Women and the Female in Neoplatonism

Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition

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James Wilberding

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Abbreviations

Abst.	*De Abstinentia*
Adv. Eth.	*Adversus ethicos*
Adv. Math	*Adversus Mathematicos*
Adv. Nat.	*Adversus Nationes*
Ad Char.	*Ad Charicleiam*
Ad Eu.	*Ad Eusebiam*
Ad Her.	*Ad Heracleium*
Aet.	*De aeternitate mundi*
Anth.	*Anthologium*
Apo	*Analytica posteriora*
AR	Dialogus des anima et ressurrectione
Aut.	*Autobiographia*
Bibl.	*Bibliotheca*
Blach.	*Wonder that happened at the church of Blachernai*
Cael.	*De Caelo*
Chro.	*Chronographia*
Con. Prae.	*Conjugalia Praecepta*
Com. Alm.	*Commentary on the Almagest*
Crat.	*Cratylus*
De Am.	*De Amore*
De Don.	*De Dono Astrolabum*
De Gen. Socr.	*De Genio Socratis*
De Gig.	*De Gigantibus*
De Ins.	*De Insomniis*
De Isi.	*De Iside et Osiride*
De Omn.	*De Omnifaria Doctrina*
Diatr.	*Diatriben*
Diog. Laert.	Diogenes Laertius
DPhA	*Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques*
dRN	*De Rerum Natura*
Ecl.	*Eclogae*
Enc.	*Encomium in matrem*
Enn.	*Enneads*
Ep.	*Epistola*
Ep.Xip.	*Letter to Xiphilinos*
Epi.	*Epicus* (*The Fall of Troy*)
Eu.	*Eumenides*

frg.	fragment
GA	*de Generatione Animalium*
Gaur.	*Ad Gaurum*
Gry.	*Gryllus*
H.	*Hymni*
HA	*Historia Animalium*
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*
IGRR	*Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes*
Il.	*Ilias*
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*
Isid.	*Vita Isidori*
Inst. Theol.	*Institutio Theologica*
in Alc.	*in Platonis Alcibiadem*
in Cael.	*in Aristotelis de Caelo commentaria*
in Cra.	*in Platonis Cratylum commentaria*
in Metaph.	*in Aristotelis Metaphysica commentaria*
in Mat.	*Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*
in Phlb.	*in Platonis Philebum scholia*
in Phd.	*in Platonis Phaedonem commentaria*
in Phdr.	*in Platonis Phaedrum scholia*
in Prm.	*in Platonis Parmenidem commentarii*
in R.	*in Platonis Rempublicam commentarii*
in Sol.	*Hymn to King Helios*
in Ti.	*in Platonis Timaeum commentarii*
Inst.	*Institutio Theologica*
Inst. Div.	*Divinae institutiones*
Isid.	*Vita Isidori*
Lg.	*Leges*
LSJ	*Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek English Lexicon*
Luc.	*Evangelium secundum Lucam*
Lucr.	*Lucretius*
Lyc.	*Lycurgus*
Marc.	*Ad Marcellam*
Men.	*Meno*
Metam.	*Metamorphoses*
Metaph.	*Metaphysica*
Mu.	*De Mundo*
Mul. Vit.	*Mulierum Virtutes*
Macr.	*Vita sanctae Macrinae*
Men.	*Meno*

Mul. Virt.	*Mulierum virtutes*
Op.	*Opera et Dies*
Opif.	*De opificio mundi*
Opif. hom.	*De opificio hominis*
Or.	*Oratio*
Or. Chald.	*Oracula Chaldaica*
Or. for.	*Orationes forensae et acta*
Or. min.	*Oratoria minora*
Or. Sty.	*Funeral Oration for his daughter Styliane, who died before the age of marriage*
Orph.	*Orphica*
PE	*Preparatio Evangelica*
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*
Ph.	*Physica*
Phdr.	*Phaedrus*
Phil. min.	*Philosophica minora*
Poe.	*Poemata*
Pol.	*Statesman*
Plot.	Plotinus
Plot.	*Vita Plotini*
Pr.	*de Principiis*
Procl.	*Vita Procli*
Ps.	*Psalm*
R.	*Respublica*
RE	*Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaften*
Rh	*Rhetorica*
Smp.	*Symposium*
Sph.	*Sophista*
Strom.	*Stromateis*
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*
Th.	*Theogonia*
Theol.	*Theologica*
Theol. Plat.	*Theologica Platonica*
Tht.	*Theaetetus*
Ti.	*Timaeus*
TLG	*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*
Top.	*Topica*
VP	*De Vita Pythogorica*
Vit. Phil.	*Vitae philosophorum*
VS	*Vitae Sophistarum*

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Introduction

Jana Schultz and James Wilberding

When thinking about female philosophers and students in antiquity, many of the names that come to mind have a connection to the Neoplatonic school of thought. Hypatia of Alexandria (4th century C.E.) whose life is reported, for example, by Damascius in the *Vita Isidori* (*Frg*. 102–105) has a legitimate claim to be the most highly esteemed female philosopher of the pre-modern world.[1] Indeed, to many ears the name 'Hypatia', having been appropriated as the title of a leading international journal of feminist philosophy, has become nearly synonymous with the issues of feminism, women and gender in philosophy. Another highly renowned female teacher of philosophy was Sosipatra who is praised by Eunapius in his *Lives of the Sophists and Philosophers* (VI, 6, 5,1–10,5,2) as a god-like person whose abilities include philosophical argumentation as well as theurgy and prophecy.[2] Furthermore, many of the male Neoplatonists had female students. Porphyry wrote a famous philosophical letter to his wife Marcella, and Damascius dedicated his *Vita Isidori* to a certain Theodora who was his student as well as Isidore's.[3]

Surprisingly, however, although Neoplatonism is connected with such renowned names like Hypatia, Sosipatra and Marcella, there has been to date no comprehensive study of women and femaleness in their own school of thought. This volume aims to rectify this neglect by offering a collection of studies of the perceptions and conceptions of the female in Neoplatonism. It originates from the conference *Philosophers, Goddesses and Principles—Women and the Female in Neoplatonism* held at the Ruhr-University in Bochum in September 2018.[4]

The first part of our volume concerns the historical status of Neoplatonic women in the real world. Here there are questions to be answered about the extent to which and the ways in which women were, historically speaking, associated with Neoplatonic philosophy and its school in late antiquity. This section consists of a detailed study by Crystal Addey that reflects on the methodological problems connected with the study of women philosophers in the Platonic

1 For detailed examinations of Hypatia's life and philosophy, see Booth (2017), Deakin (2007), Dzielska (1995), Goulding (2010), Harich-Schwarzbauer (2011), and Watts (2017).

2 See also Addey (2017), Denzey Lewis (2014), and Iles Johnstone (2012).

3 See Photius Bibliotheca, cod. 181, 125 b.

4 We like to thank the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG) for their financial support for this conference.

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tradition, which arise because sources testifying on female Platonists are rare and derive from works written by men. While criticizing post-structuralistic readings of these sources, which tend to "write women out of history", Addey argues that female philosophers were not exceptional; rather they were fairly present within the whole Platonic tradition.

The second part of our volume concerns the issue of the status of women in Neoplatonic ethical and political theory. Here the question is rather: what do Neoplatonists *say* about the role, status and abilities of women? And since nearly all surviving Neoplatonic texts were written by men, this section effectively asks what views Neoplatonic men held about women.

This section opens with James Wilberding's contribution, which offers a detailed study of Plotinus' attitude towards women by asking how Plotinus deals with the ambivalent approach to women in Plato's philosophy. This ambivalence can be witnessed, for example, in his arguing for philosopher-queens due to the equal nature of men and women while also regarding the birth as a woman as a punishment for vicious males. The author shows that Plotinus does not adopt the misogynistic aspects of Plato's reincarnation thesis, rather he regards male and female incarnations as equal in value. Furthermore, Wilberding demonstrates that—in his metaphysics—Plotinus does not simply take over the famous association of matter with the female or maternal which can be found, for example, in Plato's *Timaeus*, but instead points out that matter is barren while the mother takes active part in reproduction by contributing form-principles. Thus, the author shows that Plotinus avoids some of the aspects of the Platonic tradition which degrade women, while at the same time acknowleding that Plotinus passes over the most emancipatory aspect of Plato's philosophy, the idea of philosopher-queens.

With Luc Brisson's contribution, the volume turns to Plotinus' student Porphyry. The author examines Porphyry's letter to his wife Marcella, a protreptic text guiding Marcella to live a philosophical life. The letter offers an important source for the Neoplatonic conception of women as equally able to reach virtue and philosophical knowledge. After closely analyzing the opening passages of the letter, the author demonstrates that Porphyry's view on women is deeply imbedded into the Platonic tradition, going back to Plato's *Republic*. Special attention is given to the attempts of "Pythagorizing" Plato in Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, and the effects this "Pythagorizing" has on the conceptualization of women.

Then the volume proceeds towards the conception of women held by the late ancient Neoplatonists. Dominic O'Meara analyzes how the thesis that men and women have equal capacities for virtue was understood and developed by these thinkers. Starting with a discussion of Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's*

Republic, his examination then turns to the less known examples of Julian the Emperor's *Praise of the Empress Eusebia* and Philip the Philosopher's interpretation of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*. Julian portrays Eusebia as a philosopher-queen who is not just equal but even superior to her husband in virtue. And on Philip's interpretation *Aethiopica* presents the ascent of the soul through the various stages of virtue, whereby, the differences between the sexes disappear and the novel simply shows the (genderless) human soul reaching the Intellect.

John Dillon examines Theodore of Asine's arguments for the thesis that the virtues of men and women are the same which are preserved in Proclus's ninth essay of his *Commentary on Plato's Republic*. He also gives a detailed account of the tradition of interpreting Plato's claims on women in the *Republic*—for example by the Stoic C. Musonius Rufus—in which Theodore's arguments stand. Furthermore, he argues that Theodore's account has influenced later authors by analyzing the first book of Quintus of Smyrna's *The Fall of Troy*.

The last two papers of this section establish ties with the third part of our volume, since they focus on the connection between metaphysical ideas and the conception of women in the real world. Dirk Baltzly analyzes the role women should play in an ideal state by examining the role of female deities in the divine administration of the cosmos as it is described in Proclus' analysis of Plato's Myth of Er. For since humans should refer to the cosmic administration as a paradigm to order their own society, we can assume that Proclus envisaged female Guardians to fulfill similar functions in the state to those that the goddesses fulfill in the cosmos. The activities of the goddesses are subordinated to the activities of the male gods. While the male gods are responsible for announcing universal rules of justice, the female deities are more engaged in taking providential care of particular human souls or other encosmic entities. Furthermore, the female deities are more inclined to experience something like 'sympathy' or 'empathy' for the souls under their care. Finally, Baltzly argues that the functions Proclus' ascribe to the goddesses have some resemblance to what is called 'the ethics of care' in contemporary philosophy.

Jana Schultz examines how Damascius portrays virtuous women in his *Vita Isidori* while focusing on the tension that Damascius on the one hand praises these women and their contributions to the flourishing of the Neoplatonic schools, while on the other hand he portrays them as inferior in value and as potential obstacles to philosophical progress. The author aims at explaining this tension by referring to the relation of male and female principles in Damascius' metaphysics, which reveals the ideal male-female relationship as complementary, but with the male element in charge. This ideal depends on the conception of male principles as causes of unity and determination, while the female principles cause generation and procession, which indeed is a nec-

essary contribution—otherwise no secondary principles could arise—but also potentially dangerous since it tends towards chaos.

The third part of the volume, then, deals with the metaphysical understanding of women, or, more precisely, of female principles. Neoplatonists of late antiquity developed a gendered metaphysics that distinguishes between male and female principles repeatedly and in a variety of contexts, including in discussions of natural phenomena in the domains of biology and astrology.

Miira Tuominen examines how male and female gods, humans and animals are presented in Porphyry's *On Abstinence*, thereby connecting the metaphysical and the biological realm. She argues that although Porprhyry to an extent subscribes to a general framework in which femaleness is devaluated due to the metaphorical connection of reason with maleness and of passion and the body with femaleness, Porphyry presents neither the goddesses nor the female humans and animals he discusses as inferior to their male counterparts. Rather, he even derives the model of animal virtue, also for males, from the female animals, mainly from the care female animals provide for their offsprings.

The section continues with a contribution by Marije Martijn which examines the nature and function of Aphrodite in the philosophy of different Neoplatonists, starting with Plotinus and ending with a brief look at the Renaissance Neoplatonists Ficino and Pico. The author points out that for none of the Neoplatonists is Aphrodite simply the goddess of love. Instead, Plotinus identifies her with soul, distinguishing between the uranian Aphrodite identified with the Soul Hypostasis and the pandemic Aphrodite identified with the World Soul. In both cases, Aphrodite is connected to Eros since she generates it by her longing to revert to Intellect. In Hermias and Proclus, however, Aphrodite is not identified with the Soul Hypostasis or the World Soul, rather she is one of the Olympian gods, existing on the hypercosmic as well as on the encosmic level. In all her manifestations, she is primarily a cause of connection, creating a bond between hierarchically ordered opposites by siding with the lower element, that is by bringing it closer to the higher.

Christoph Helmig analyzes Emperor Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* (Cybele) by focusing on the question of how Julian integrates this goddess and her lover Attis into Neoplatonic metaphysics. He shows that—in the attempt to defend Cybele and her cult against Christian attacks—Julian provides an allegorical reading of the goddess and her cult that reveals the myth and the cult concerning Cybele to concern the purification of the soul. Julian identifies Attis with the metaphysical principle—belonging to the realm of soul—that is responsible for the Forms in matter. His castration points to the delimitation of the procession towards matter through higher causes like Cybele and the return of the soul engaged with matter to these causes.

Proclus' metaphysics is also the focus of Danielle Layne's contribution which offers a feminist reading of the goddess Night, the first gendered goddess in Proclus' system. While problematizing that Proclus—like many ancient authors—tends to suppress or neglect the female in order to create the image of a purely male father-son lineage, the author argues that Night, far from fulfilling solely subordinate tasks in the male creation work, plays an essential role in the unfolding of reality. She is the paradigm of the bond in Proclus' system, mediating the intelligible goodness and being to all divine orders. The author shows this power of Night especially in her relation to the paternal Demiurge who needs to turn to Night in order to get in touch with Phanes, the intelligible paradigm of the cosmos. The Demiurge is instructed by Night to create a bond between all the manifold entities in the cosmos in order to create unity between them without destroying their multiplicity.

In the last section, the volume aims at giving some indications of the way in which the conceptualization of women and femaleness of the pagan Neoplatonists influenced Christian thinkers. We will thus conclude with two examples of Christian Neoplatonists which illustrate how some of the issues discussed in the chapters above were appropriated and developed in the Christian tradition.

Peter Adamson analyzes the presentation of Gregory of Nyssa's sister Macrina in his *On the Soul and Resurrection* in which Macrina—on her deathbed—explains to Gregory the immaterial nature of the soul. The author provides a detailed analysis of Macrina's method of argumentation, showing that she is drawn as a model of rationality. Referring to this presentation of Macrina, Adamson then argues that for Gregory (as for most pagan Neoplatonists) the true human self, that is, the rational soul, is genderless.

The volume closes with Denis Walter's contribution which examines how the medieval philosopher Michael Psellos conceptualizes women. He points out that Michael Psellos seems to argue for the equal ability of men and women to achieve virtues. However, if one looks deeper into his description of certain men and women, one realizes that he never mentions a woman engaged in scientific activity, i.e., in the theoretical examination of created nature. That is all the more important as Psellos seems to be skeptical about the prospects of achieving a direct connection to God (in contrast to an indirect connection by scientific research) which is chosen by certain female characters he portrays. This, however, does not mean that Psellos excluded women from a happy life, for philanthropic activities are also a way to reach happiness, but it hints at a certain intellectual inferiority in women.

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PART 1

The Historical Presence of Women in Neoplatonic Schools

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CHAPTER 1

Diotima, Sosipatra and Hypatia: Methodological Reflections on the Study of Female Philosophers in the Platonic Tradition

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Introduction

Ascertaining the scale of female involvement in ancient philosophy is fraught with methodological difficulties.[1] Within the Platonic tradition, women seem to have been students and members of Plato's Academy and are attested within Plutarch's philosophical circle and within most of the philosophical schools associated with Neoplatonism in late antiquity.[2] Yet numerous methodological problems surround any attempt to ascertain the historical roles and significance of women within the Platonic tradition. First, we should note the wide variety of chronological, geographical and educational contexts involved in examining women's involvement in the Platonic tradition, and even within Neoplatonism itself. Thus, analyses must remain sensitive to historically specific differences and contexts. Second, many of the methodological issues which relate to any examination of women and their roles in antiquity also apply to female philosophers: few works written by women survive; consequently, we do not often hear their views directly.[3] Problems of authenticity and lack of context often surround writings by women which do survive.[4] Thus, most of the extant evidence about women is written by the male educated elite, raising the further issue of class bias. Most evidence about women is drawn from brief accounts reported in the biographical tradition; such evidence may tell us more about male preoccupations and assumptions about women than about the relevant women themselves.[5] Post-structuralist critique has further undermined any attempt to derive historical data about women from the late antique biographical tradition, with some ancient historians com-

1 Addey (2018, 411–432).
2 See Addey (2018, 411 n. 1; 416–431), for a survey of the relevant evidence.
3 Cf. for example, Deslauriers (2012, 344), Blundell (1995, 10).
4 Deslauriers (2012, 343–345).
5 See Pomeroy (1975, x—xi), Just (1989, 1–12), Blundell, (1995, 10–11).

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paring late antique *Vitae* to fictional literary works and seeing the depiction of specific late antique women as teachers of wisdom as little more than a literary trope.[6]

Within the context of ancient philosophy, these methodological problems are especially pronounced: almost no philosophical texts written by women survive.[7] Faced with this dearth of female-authored sources and the scanty extant evidence about women drawn primarily from the biographical tradition, scholars have often interpreted female involvement in ancient philosophy as anomalous and exceptional. To offer a representative example, Richard Hawley has argued that women philosophers were "few" in number, exceptions to the rule in antiquity and "effectively appendages to their male mentors," while recognizing that the biographical tradition exhibits "a pattern of women philosophers as anomalies whose departure from recognized social behaviour requires special explanation."[8] Although the female philosophers presented in late antique *Lives* (*Vitae*) are certainly represented as exceptionally gifted individuals, whether they were exceptional in number is a difficult question which needs to be approached with caution. Furthermore, the tendency to present philosophical women as "appendages to their male mentors" does not seem to reflect ancient representations of women philosophers in the Platonic tradition. For example, Diotima, Asclepigeneia and Hypatia are actually presented as female mentors to well-respected male philosophers, that is to say, as the female teachers of Socrates, Proclus and Synesius respectively.[9] Meanwhile, Sosipatra is represented by Eunapius as setting up her own philosophical school alongside that of Aedesius, the main successor of Iamblichus' philosophical school:

> καὶ ἀντεκάθητό γε αὐτῷ φιλοσοφοῦσα κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτῆς οἰκίαν ἡ Σωσιπάτρα, καί, μετὰ τὴν Αἰδεσίου συνουσίαν, παρ' ἐκείνην φοιτῶντες, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις τὴν μὲν ἐν λόγοις ἀκρίβειαν Αἰδεσίου ⟨οὐ⟩ περιηγάπα καὶ συνεθαύμαζεν, τὸν δὲ τῆς γυναικὸς ἐνθουσιασμὸν προσεκύνει καὶ ἐσεβάζετο.
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> In her own home, Sosipatra held a chair of philosophy that rivalled his, and after attending the lectures of Aedesius, the students would go to hear hers; and though there was none that did not greatly appreciate

6 Clark (1998a, 14–31), (1998b, 416–417).

7 Cf. Snyder (1989, 100).

8 Hawley (1994, 70–71). Cf. Urbano (2013, 246–247).

9 Diotima as Socrates' teacher: Plato, *Symposium* 201d–212c; Asclepigeneia as Proclus' teacher in theurgy: Marinus, *Proc.* 28.10–15. Hypatia as Syneius' teacher: Synesius, *Ep.* 5.305–308.

> and admire the accurate learning of Aedesius, they positively adored and revered the woman's inspired teaching.[10]

Sosipatra's 'inspiration' (ἐνθουσιασμός) refers to the theurgic and inspired nature of her philosophical teaching, as well as to her oracular abilities. Eunapius seems to imply that the more advanced students studied with her after preliminary study with Aedesius.[11] In this representation, Sosipatra certainly does not appear as an appendage to any male mentor.

This paper will examine these methodological issues, focusing especially on: (1) the concept of philosophy in Greco-Roman antiquity, especially its iteration as a way of life, and the implications of this concept for assessing female involvement in philosophical activities; (2) other sources of evidence for ancient female philosophers, especially epigraphic evidence; (3) the importance of considering women's involvement in religious cult alongside their philosophical activity; and (4) later processes of textual transmission and views of women within the medieval Christian tradition in the Latin West and the Arabic tradition in the East, and implications for the (lack of) transmission of female writings. Examining the portrayals of Diotima, Sosipatra and Hypatia, as well as other female philosophers associated with the Platonic tradition, I argue that women were fairly consistently involved in the Platonic tradition from the classical period through to late antiquity and that more attention needs to be paid to methodological assumptions and issues—and the scholarly preoccupations and implicit biases that often underline these assumptions—in order to shed further light on the historical significance and roles of women within the Platonic tradition.

1 Defining Female Philosophers and the Concept of 'Philosophy'

In determining the historical presence of female philosophers in the Platonic tradition, an important methodological issue relates to how we categorize female philosophers and their activities; this issue is based on how we define 'philosophy', exactly what counts as 'philosophical activity' and who counts as a 'philosopher.' Several scholars have excluded women engaged in certain intellectual activities from philosophy because they do not consider their activities to count as 'philosophy'—in particular, scholars have questioned whether

10 Eunapius, *vs* 6.9.1,1–6 (469); Cf. Iles Johnston (2012, 107).

11 Cf. also *vs* 6.8.12–13 (469); Fowden (1982, 39), Addey (2017, 148).

a philosopher had to be a professional who taught students and produced philosophical works, or whether philosophical students also count as 'philosophers.'[12] This issue is further exacerbated by variant definitions of 'philosophy', especially variations between ancient and modern notions of what 'philosophy' is.[13] Sarah Hutton has noted that the modern philosophical canon, as received, with its orientation towards present philosophical interests and its distinction between major and minor figures, "is founded on conceptions of philosophy, philosophers and philosophical significance which are too restrictive to accommodate women."[14]

In relation to examining ancient female philosophers, it seems best to adhere to simple definitions of 'philosophy' and the 'philosopher' which reflect ancient views of their nature—that is to say, internal definitions that avoid anachronism. Gillian Clark and Tessa Rajak define philosophy as "literally, the love of wisdom, the need to understand what the world is like and how human beings should live."[15] As Jonathan Barnes has stated, "to call oneself *philosophos* in antiquity was to declare a love of wisdom and an eagerness to study things human and divine."[16] If a closer characterization of 'philosophy' seems necessary, the traditional tripartition of philosophy into logic, physics and ethics does not assist with categorizing female philosophers or in excluding certain women from 'philosophy,' given that it remains extremely problematic to attribute specific philosophical activity in logic, physics or ethics to particular women when we know so little of the sum total of their intellectual activities during their entire lifetime, which is an enormous methodological problem.[17] A major feature of philosophy in the Platonic tradition is its iteration as a way of life, as a daily practice rather than just as a type of investigation or study.[18] This issue has major implications for assessing female involvement in ancient philosophical activities: when philosophy is considered to be a way of life, a much wider range of pursuits (including domestic practices and conduct) become more relevant and central to philosophical activity.

For example, Kathleen O'Brien Wicker observes three major kinds of involvement in philosophy by women in antiquity: (1) the study of the theoretical, speculative questions of philosophy; (2) the practice of the social and

12 Cf. Deslauriers (2012, 344), O'Brien Wicker (1987, 34 n. 54).
13 Cf. Levick (2002, 134).
14 Hutton (2015, 10).
15 Clark and Rajak (2002, 1).
16 Barnes (2002, 293–306).
17 Addey (2018, 415–416).
18 See Hadot (1995), Clark (2007, 168–172).

ethical aspects of philosophy; and (3) the commitment to philosophy as a personal, spiritual way of life, grounded in specific metaphysical principles.[19] She places women like Lastheneia and Axiothea, who were reputed to be Plato's students, in the first category, seemingly because they were known to be members of philosophical schools.[20] Within the second category, she places Pythagorean women and the women around Plutarch (especially Eurydice); her criterion seems to be whether ethical ideas and doctrines supported the traditional roles of women. She places Porphyry's wife Marcella into the third category and assumes that philosophy as a personal way of life is different from the traditional lifestyle of women.[21] Yet given that philosophy was considered a way of life in antiquity, these three kinds of involvement cannot be so clearly demarcated—the study of the theoretical questions of philosophy was intimately linked with the ethical, practical and social aspects of philosophy. Indeed, O'Brien Wicker's final statement that "commitment to philosophy as a personal, spiritual way of life" was "grounded in specific metaphysical principles" is extremely telling in this regard, since the practice of philosophy was intrinsically linked with metaphysical, theological, ethical, social, epistemological and even cosmological principles. In his *Letter to Marcella*, Porphyry engages with Marcella on many metaphysical issues which affect and have important ramifications for ethical conduct and the daily practice of philosophy as a spiritual way of life.[22]

The (scholarly) determination of precisely what constitutes 'philosophical' content within surviving ancient works or fragments attributed to women is also based on one's view (whether explicit or implicit) of what constitutes 'philosophy' and 'philosophical activity.' The so-called pseudo-Pythagorean letters and writings, many of which focus on domestic activity, have often been omitted by scholars from the Western philosophic tradition, generally because these works are not regarded as 'philosophy' but rather as particular women's concerns removed from more universal philosophical issues.[23] Yet, male philosophers also wrote philosophical letters focusing on these topics, e.g., Iamblichus wrote a letter to Sopater on bringing up children and a letter to an unknown recipient on marriage.[24] Indeed, the editors of Iamblichus' *Letters*, John Dillon

19 O'Brien Wicker (1987, 34, n. 54).

20 Diogenes Laertius III 46; O'Brien Wicker (1987, 34–35, n. 54).

21 Cf. O'Brien Wicker (1987, 34–35, n. 54).

22 Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 3, 37–38; 3,50–51; 3, 44–46; 10, 183–186. Cf. Addey, (2018, 424).

23 For a representative example, see Deslauriers (2012, 343). For a useful summary of the debate, see Vivante (2007, 167).

24 Iamblichus, *Letter* 14: *To Sopater, On Bringing up Children* (= Stobaeus, *Anth.* 2.31.122); *Let-*

and Wolfgang Polleichtner, comment that among the surviving letters, we have one group on virtue and each of the specific virtues, a further group focuses on political topics such as ruling and another group concentrating on household management (*oikonomia*), which means that all three of the traditional subdivisions of the ethical branch of philosophy are given some level of attention.[25] Topics such as domestic activity, maintaining a well-run household and the healthy upbringing of children were considered by many ancient philosophers (particularly those within the Platonic tradition) to be expressions of philosophical virtue or principle; works which focus on such concerns should not be marginalized or elided in our search for female philosophers.[26] Indeed, it is crucial not to exclude from the category of 'philosopher' women who wrote about domestic affairs from a philosophical perspective, not only because philosophy was held to be a daily practice and a way of life but also because women were often confined to domestic roles in antiquity. Furthermore, any public-private distinction in relation to ancient philosophical activity within Neoplatonism (and Middle Platonism) is considerably blurred, since philosophical schools were often small-scale and based in the household of a philosopher or one of his or her colleagues. Methodologically, it seems sensible to make our definitions of 'philosophical activity' and the 'philosopher' explicit, as well as broad and inclusive—and to pay close attention to ancient conceptions and connotations of 'philosophy' and the *philosophos* so as to avoid anachronism.[27]

2 Post-structuralist Critique and Late Antique Biography: Writing Women out of History?

Part of the problem of locating specific female philosophers historically is that they are often only attested in one source, making it difficult to confirm their historicity—furthermore, this source is often biographical, such as a late antique *Life* (*Vita*). Ancient biographies were hagiographical, selective and consist of a series of symbolic gestures and characterizations of their sub-

ter 19: *To an Unknown Recipient, On Marriage* (= Stobaeus, *Anth.* 4.33.57). *Letter* 14 survives intact but only one short fragment of *Letter* 19 survives. We should also note that one of the 20 letters is addressed to a woman, Arete, who may have been Iamblichus' pupil: cf. p. 19 below.

25 See Dillon and Polleichtner (2009, xx), who note that Sopater had two sons, Sopater the Younger and Himerius—both went on to distinguished careers in public life.

26 Clark (2007, 170).

27 Cf. Vivante (2007, 167), Hutton (2015, 10–11, 18), also argues that we need an approach which is more historically grounded and inclusive.

ject; they are certainly not straightforward historical accounts or documents, yet nevertheless they seem to attest in some sense to the historical existence of late antique female philosophers and their philosophical practices. However, recently, some ancient historians have used post-structuralist theories to undermine *any* reading of late antique *Lives* (*Vitae*) as "… mines for the construction of social history".[28] These critiques challenge any kind of historical reading of late antique biographies but the *Lives* which focus on women have come especially under attack. For example, Elizabeth Clark's critique focuses on the depiction of early Christian women saints, who were often contemporary with Neoplatonist female philosophers. She claims that late antique *Lives* share many features with the genre of the ancient novel that were popular in the period rather than with classical biography that focused on the public activities of statesmen and generals and notes that women did not operate in a public political sphere.[29] However, this observation seems largely irrelevant for late antique female philosophers since there are precedents in the *Lives* focusing on earlier and contemporary male philosophers.[30] Furthermore, women did have significant public religious roles in Graeco-Roman antiquity, a subject I return to below.

Elizabeth Clark argues that the tendency of late antique *Lives* to present their heroines as teachers of wisdom is solely a literary trope relating to the 'social logic' of a text. Her case study examines Gregory of Nyssa's two treatises that focus on his sister Macrina and present her as his philosophical teacher: her *Life* (*Vita*) and *On the Soul and the Resurrection*.[31] She notes that Gregory's presentation of Macrina is not original but borrows from an obvious philosophical precedent: Plato's Diotima.[32] She then cites David Halperin's (admittedly influential) essay "Why is Diotima a woman?" which argues that Diotima is a trope for Socrates himself, introduced to allow the values of reciprocity and creativity (which ancient Greek men associated with women) into a male philosophical culture.[33] In an analogous fashion, Elizabeth Clark then

28 Clark (1998a, 18).

29 See Clark (1998a, 16–17), (1998b, 418). Cf. also Cooper (1996, 1–44) for an extended comparative study of the depiction of women in Late Antique *Lives* and in the ancient novel.

30 See, for example, Porphyry, *Plot*.; Eunapius, *vs*; Marinus, *Procl*.

31 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina*; *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, tr. Callahan; Clark (1998b, 423–424).

32 Clark (1998a, 24), (1998b, 424–425). See also Burrus (2005, 252) for a similar analysis of Macrina and her parallel with Halperin (1990).

33 Halperin (1990, 257–308), Clark (1998b, 424–425). Burrus (2005, 258) also considers Gregory's depiction of Macrina to function in the same manner as Halperin's interpretation of Diotima—thus, Macrina's depiction as both virgin and mother in the *Life of Macrina*

argues that Macrina is not herself a teacher of wisdom, but a trope for Gregory, which allows him to (1) think through troubling intellectual theological and intellectual issues, and (2) use Macrina as a shaming device for Christian male readers.[34] She concludes:

> Thus, we should be cautious in assuming that wisdom-cast-as woman provides an unproblematic positive evaluation of "real women" [...] The attribution may have nothing to do with the empowerment of "real" women or with an exaltation of the feminine [...] How might this understanding of theoretical issues apply more broadly to the analysis of women and gender in early Christian texts? I think that scholars must move beyond the stage of feminist historiography in which we retrieve another forgotten woman and throw her into the historical mix. I do not mean to belittle the enterprise of recovery—after all, I myself have engaged in it, and would like to believe that these labours have served useful functions. That moment of recovery was, of course, politically charged, as part of a project to emphasize women's roles throughout Christian history; it constituted a celebratory move that gave courage to contemporary women by lauding our foremothers.[35]

Although close attention needs to be paid to the rhetorical and literary strategies used by ancient biographers to characterize their subjects, and careful thought must be given to the possibility that female figures are used as ciphers for male views, interpreting ancient portrayals of women solely in relation to this function has the potential to minimize female agency. Clark's example—Macrina—was actually the sister of her biographer, Gregory, as well as his teacher, and presumably influenced many of her brother's views and shared them, but to reduce her representation to a cipher for Gregory's views significantly elides any conception of female agency.[36] The representation of women

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serves to entrench the "universalizing discourse in the male culture of late ancient orthodox Christianity" and, as such, is a reflection of "masculine erotics."

34 Clark (1998b, 426–429). Cf. Boersma (2013, 109–116) for a critique of Clark's and Burrus' interpretation of the role(s) of Macrina in Gregory's works: "His [i.e. Gregory's] 'destabilizing' of gender is the result not of an attempt to appropriate Macrina and thus to assert masculine control. The discourse ... is in fact part of a larger body of reflection on anagogical entry into an angelic (and thus genderless) or virginal life. This anagogical discourse is, in turn, closely wrapped up in Gregory's overall Trinitarian and Christological thought."

35 Clark (1998a, 30–31).

36 Unlike Clark, Burrus (2005, 259) offers an analysis that leaves open the possibility of female agency: "Without downplaying Gregory's literary artfulness in the least, I think the

as teachers of wisdom in the late antique period may be a literary trope, but it may well reflect the activities of historical women as well, especially if we take into account the religious activities of many of the female subjects of late antique *Lives*. Joan Breton Connelly examines the recurring depiction of male philosophers receiving advice from priestesses, from the report that Pythagoras studied philosophy under the Delphic priestess Themistoclea to Diotima to Clea, and concludes:

> The recurring model that finds a philosopher seeking out the authority of a prophetess may suggest that the influence of priestly women was quite real [...] these portraits of priestly women, esteemed for their learning and wise counsel, suggest that female cult agents played significant roles as teachers and advisors of men.[37]

Indeed, we would not doubt that historical male philosophers aspired to be teachers of wisdom, even if their portrayal as such in late antique *Lives* becomes a literary trope; once again, ancient women seem to be evaluated differently from their male counterparts—that is to say, according to different methodological criteria or assumptions—within scholarship. The danger of post-structuralist critiques such as Elizabeth Clark's is that the historical presence and contributions of 'real women' in the ancient world may be obscured, undermined or entirely elided—in other words, this kind of post-structuralist interpretation could be seen as a hermeneutic strategy that effectively writes women out of history. Consequently, such hermeneutic approaches may contribute to the reification and reinforcement of patriarchal structures that elide, downplay or marginalize women's intellectual activities and contributions, ancient and modern.[38]

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temptation of an attempted retrieval of a 'historical Macrina' is worth yielding to, momentarily and strategically." She also offers some critique of Halperin's reading of Diotima: "What I am getting at here is the possibility that the discursive space occupied earlier by Plato's Diotima and flute girl, or here by Gregory's Macrina, might also correlate, however inexactly, with the social roles and influence of women: that the textual production of an articulable feminine positionality via the interaction of the female as 'object' and the female as the excluded transgressive may at least indirectly point toward actual subject positions and social roles available to and occupiable by women in the always incomplete formation of male homosocial communities" (259).

37 Connelly (2007, 220, 276–278).

38 Cf. Spender (1988, 12).

3 Epigraphic Evidence for Female Philosophers

Part of the problem with studying certain female philosophers is that they are often only attested in one specific source, making it difficult to confirm their historicity or identity. One of the two female figures who feature in Plato's works—Diotima—appears only in the *Symposium*.[39] Debra Nails has noted that "[t]here is a current and widespread assumption that Diotima is the *one* named character Plato certainly invented."[40] Indeed, we have already seen that David Halperin's essay argues exactly that.[41] Nails notes that "her fictionality is typically stated without reasons or, when reasons are offered, provided in glancing strokes."[42] Several arguments are typically given by scholars: first, that Plato could not have met Diotima (discussed further below); second, as noted by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff:

> Diotima in her speech makes an allusion to the view that Aristophanes had presented at the banquet [...] This [...] suggests that even if Diotima actually existed, what she is represented as actually saying to Socrates cannot have been composed, as Socrates claims, long before the party during which she relates it.[43]

Yet, as Debra Nails has argued, "there is no such anachronism" since neither Aristophanes nor Socrates should be credited with originality here, as Kenneth Dover notes: "Plato means us to regard the theme and the framework of Aristophanes' story as characteristic not of comedy but of unsophisticated,

39 The dramatic date of the *Symposium* is 416 BC when Agathon won his first victory as a tragic poet (*Symp*. 173a5–6) at the Lenaea: Dover (1980, 9). Thus at the party Socrates is in his early fifties, while Alcibiades is in his thirties. Nails (2002, 137) s.v. Diotima of Mantinea, states that the dramatic date of the *Symposium* and Socrates' claim that Diotima put off the Athenian plague for a decade push his acquaintance with her back to 440 or so, when Socrates was around thirty.

40 Nails (2002, 137). For an exception, see Kranz (1926, 437–447), who argues that Diotima was undoubtedly a historical figure.

41 Halperin (1990, 257–308).

42 Nails (2015, 75).

43 Cf. Nehamas and Woodruff (1989, xii) citing *Symp* 205d–e, 212c. Cf. Nails (2002, 137–138): "... one need not assume that Plato contrived the whole speech of Aristophanes *ex nihilo*. As with the book of Zeno in the *Parmenides*, or the speech of Lysias in the *Phaedrus*, it has often been noted that the change of style and manner may well reflect Plato's ability at mimicry or his reconstructing an existing original. The myth on which Aristophanes based his speech in the *Symposium* may be from a lost play; it may have a precedent in mythology unknown to us."

subliterate folklore."[44] The third reason is literary—that Plato's Diotima is a homage to the guiding role played by the goddess in Parmenides' poem. Furthermore, "Plato embeds her so deeply—stories within stories—to signal that she is removed from reality."[45] Debra Nails notes that Socrates is not the only person in the work to report a flashback, and few want to claim that Alcibiades' recollections never took place, and so discounts this reason.[46] Overall, 'arguments from silence' (i.e. in the absence of evidence) are generally used with caution within the discipline of classics—because only a tiny proportion of the evidence from antiquity survives and newly discovered evidence can turn up at any stage.[47] Yet, as Nails notes, "the argument from silence is the most commonly employed to the conclusion that Diotima is not historical."[48]

Moving to Neoplatonism and late antique philosophy, almost all of the Neoplatonic female philosophers whom we hear about (with the exception of Hypatia) are only attested in one source—and most of these are late antique *Lives* (*Vitae*). The women associated with Plotinus' philosophical school in Rome, Gemina the Elder and Younger, and Amphiclea, are only known to us from Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, even though Porphyry tells us that all three women were regular, dedicated members of the school (out of 14 regular members mentioned) and despite the fact that Plotinus' school was actually based in the household of Gemina the Elder.[49] Marcella, Porphyry's wife, is only attested in Porphyry's *Letter to Marcella*.[50] Iamblichus addresses one of his philosophical letters to Arete, who may have been a student of his—we do not hear of her in any other source, except for a possible brief reference to her in Julian's *Letter to Themistius*.[51] Both Sosipatra and Asclepigeneia are only known from one source: Eunapius' *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* and Marinus' *Life of Proclus* respectively. Damascius' (now fragmentary) *Life of Isidore* is dedicated to a woman called Theodora, who had been his and Isidore's philosophical

44 Dover (1989, 45); Nails (2015, 75).
45 Nails (2015, 75).
46 Nails (2015, 75).
47 Nails (2002, 137).
48 Nails (2002, 137).
49 Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 9, 1–6. Cf. O'Brien Wicker (1987, 35–36, n. 56).
50 Marcella may be attested by Damascius, *Philosophical History*, *Frg*. 49, who refers to Theo, a teacher of rhetoric, as descended "from the holy Marcella" (ἀπὸ τῆς ἱερᾶς Μαρκέλλης). The editor and translator of the text, Polymnia Athanassiadi (141, n. 115), argues that this must be a reference to Porphyry's wife given that if Proclus' mother of the same name were meant, Proclus himself would have been mentioned.
51 cf. Iamblichus, *Letter* 3: *To Arete: On Self-Control*; Julian, *Letter to Themistius* 259d; Dillon and Polleichtner (2009, xvii).

pupil (along with her younger sisters) and who had specifically requested (with other fellow students) that Damascius write a life of Isidore; she is described by Photius as learned in philosophy, poetry, grammar, geometry and higher arithmetic and as a descendant of the royal house of Emesa in Syria, like Iamblichus.[52] It is worth reflecting that if these sources of evidence had not survived, *we would not know anything at all about these women*.

Can other sources of evidence for ancient female philosophers, especially epigraphic evidence, help us out of this impasse? We do have epigraphic evidence that attests to women as philosophers in antiquity: this evidence challenges and, ultimately, undermines the argument that the female philosophers mentioned above in philosophical sources are anomalies. From the Roman Imperial period onwards, female philosophers are named in some inscriptions; frequently, these inscriptions are the only extant source of evidence for them. So, for example, one inscription found in Apollonia in Mysia attests to a female philosopher called Magnilia:

> Μά[γ]νιλλα[ν φιλό]‖σοφον Μάγν[ου] ‖ φιλοσόφου θυ[γα‖τέρα, Μηνίο[υ φιλο‖σόφ]ου γυ[ναῖκα].
>
> Magnilia, a philosopher, daughter of Magnus, a philosopher, wife of Menius, a philosopher.
>
> *IGRR* IV.125[53]

Like Sosipatra and Asclepigeneia, Magnilia would be entirely unknown to us if the one source of evidence that mentions her (i.e. this inscription) had not survived.[54] Further inscriptions also mention female philosophers such as this one dedicated to Aurelia Oppia, who belonged to the aristocracy of Sparta:

> ἡ πόλις [τὴν φιλ]οσοφωτάτην καὶ σωφρο[νεστάτη]ν Αὐρηλίαν Ὀππίαν [... τοῦ] φιλοσοφωτάτου Αὐ[ρη]λ[ίου ...] θυγατέρα, [γυναῖκα] δὲ τοῦ εὐγενεστάτου [Τε]ισαμενοῦ τοῦ στρατα[γ]οῦ (?) καὶ, ὡς χρηματίζε[ι ἐστίαν πόλ]εως,[55]

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52 Damascius, *Philosophical History*, *Testimonia* III, lines 3–18 = Photius, *Bibl. Cod.* 181. See Athanassiadi, (1999, 58, 64).

53 *IGRR* IV.125 (Apollonia, Mysia, Asia Minor: in a wall just inside the gate; marble block; letters: 1.25 inches). Cf. Munro, "Inscriptions", 269, n. 6.

54 Barnes (2002, 293).

55 There is a lacuna in line 9 of the inscription; I have adopted the reading of Kolbe (1913), *IG* V.1.598 (χρηματίζε[ι ἐστίαν πόλ]εως) rather than that of Martha (1879, 196) who would read Tisamenos' full name here.

> νέαν Πηνελό[πει]αν, ἀρετῆς πάσ[ης ἕνεκα καὶ] τῆς περὶ τὰς θε[ὰς εὐσεβ]εί[ας], προσδεξαμ[ένου τὸ ἀνάλωμα] Μ(άρκου) Αὐρ(ηλίου) Εὐτυχιανο[ῦ …] …[56]
>
> The city [honours] the most philosophical and modest Aurelia Oppia,
> daughter of the most philosophical Aurelius,
> Wife of the well-born Teisamenos, the general/magistrate (?)
> And, as named [i.e. recorded] [on] the altar of the city, now Penelope,
> For the sake of all virtue and the worship of the goddesses,
> The expenditure will be accepted from Marcus Aurelius Eutychianos …
>
> *IG* V.1.598, lines 1–13

Certain philologists have argued that the use of the term *philosophos* and its cognates became a general term of praise in the Roman imperial period, which was applied increasingly widely and liberally, while its range of meaning was correspondingly reduced.[57] By this line of argument, Magnilia and Aurelia Oppia were not necessarily philosophers, despite being referred to as such. However, Jonathan Barnes argues that there is no reason to think that there is a special inscriptional sense of the term which it bears on honorific and funerary stones; furthermore, the term *philosophos* was used in antiquity to denote both professional and non-professional philosophers.[58] The adjectival use of the term to describe Aurelia Oppia might be considered to convey general commendation—however, the use of two adjectival terms (φιλοσοφωτάτην καὶ σωφρονεστάτην) in the inscription emphasizes two commendable features, suggesting that the term φιλοσοφωτάτην has a specific rather than general sense.[59] Furthermore, it seems significant that the *polis*—Sparta—honors Aurelia Oppia with the term; thus, the use of the term is much more than just a matter of self-identification and also points towards the specific sense of the term rather than a general term of moral praise.[60]

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56 *IG* V.1.598, lines 1–13. Inscription as edited by Martha (1879, 195–196, lines 1–13), who states that it was found on a statue dedicated by Sparta in honor of this woman, who was a member of the aristocracy in Sparta (196). She married Tisamenos and her daughter was called Herakleia. The latter seems to have held a religious function as priestess in the temple of Artemis Orthia at Sparta since the statue of Herakleia was erected in the temple. Martha argues that it is probable that Aurelia Oppia, like her daughter, was also attached to the temple of Artemis Orthia.

57 See Malingrey (1961). Cf. Barnes (2002, 297–298) for a useful summary of scholarship on the term *philosophos* and its cognates.

58 Barnes (2002, 298, 303–304).

59 Barnes (2002, 304).

60 I would like to thank Dominic O'Meara for discussion of the significance of the public nature of this inscription as dedicated by the *polis* to Aurelia Oppia.

A further inscription found on a statue dedicated to Aurelia Oppia's daughter, which had been erected in the temple of Artemis Orthia, describes her daughter as "the most pious and most philosophical Herakleia, daughter of Teisamenos" (τὴν σεμνοτάτην καὶ φιλοσοωτάτην … Ἡράκλειάαν Τεισαμενοῦ) and as a priestess of Artemis Orthia.[61] On this basis, it has been argued that Aurelia Oppia was also attached to the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia as a priestess, since she is also praised for her piety and worship of the goddesses and another inscription informs us that the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia was dedicated to Artemis and other divinities connected with her.[62] Here we have two generations of women philosophers in a family which had at least three generations of philosophers: it is interesting that although Aurelia's father was a philosopher, her husband seems to have been a general or magistrate (he is certainly not named as a philosopher or described as "philosophical")—yet their daughter Herakleia became a philosopher. This may suggest that ancient upper-class women became philosophers not only because of their association with a male mentor or family member who was a philosopher, but also under the influence of their female mentors or relatives. Herakleia, and possibly her mother Aurelia as well, was a priestess of Artemis as well as a philosopher. From Rome, we hear of another female philosopher, "Euphrosyne: pious, instructed in the nine muses, philosopher: she lived for twenty years" (*Euphrosyne* ‖ *pia*, ‖ *docta novem musis*, ‖ *philosopha, v.a.* XX).[63]

These inscriptions remind us that there were 'real' female philosophers in Graeco-Roman antiquity—especially from the Roman imperial period onwards—who are otherwise unattested in the historical record. Archaeological and epigraphic evidence can provide an important corrective to the distorting effects of literary sources, as well as the accident of survival.[64] Thus, when examining the historical presence of female philosophers in the Platonic tradition (and especially in Neoplatonism) it is vital to gather and analyze evidence from the literary, epigraphic and archaeological records in order to attain a balanced and well-rounded picture of female philosophical activity. In fact, many classicists have already adopted this pluriform approach to the study of women in antiquity.[65]

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61 *IG* V.1.599. Cf. Martha, (1879, 196–197).

62 Martha (1879, 196–197). Cf. *CIG* 1444: τῆς θεοῦ Ἀρτέμιδ[ος] Ὀ[ρ]θείας κ[αὶ] τῶν συνκ[α]θειδρυμένων αὐτῇ θ[ε]ῶν.

63 *IL S* 7783. Cf. Barnes (2002, XXX).

64 As noted by Connelly (2007, 3) in relation to ancient Graeco-Roman evidence for priestesses.

65 See Blok (1987, 44), Sourvinou-Inwood (1987, 41–58), (2005), Connelly (2007, 17, 275–277).

4 Female Philosophers and Women's Religious Roles

Aside from the fact that many female philosophers are attested in only one source, and the historical credibility of these sources has been questioned, another possible reason why the contributions of female philosophers have so often been overlooked may relate to the focus of their philosophical activity and their related religious identities. Of female philosophers within Neoplatonism, the most well-known by far is certainly Hypatia. This may be partially because there is more evidence about her, with several sources attesting to her life and philosophical works, and of course one of the factors why she is mentioned so much is due to her brutal murder by Christian monks.[66]

However, a further important factor for her subsequent reputation among scholars of philosophy relates to the focus of her philosophical activities, specifically to her role as a mathematician, as well as a philosopher. The scientific focus of her work conforms neatly with contemporary scholarly approaches towards philosophy and its practice.[67] By contrast, the philosophical roles and contributions of other female philosophers associated with the Platonic tradition—such as Diotima, Clea, Sosipatra, Asclepigeneia, to name but a few—are often minimised or their historical existence has been questioned. Although one reason for this clearly relates to the paucity of evidence regarding these female philosophers, a more implicit (yet important) reason may well be that all of these women are presented as priestesses or prophetesses, as well as philosophers. The modern European philosophical tradition is extremely resistant to seeing religion as having any role within philosophy, and therefore these women are often dismissed or excluded from philosophy, either explicitly or implicitly.[68] This seems problematic for several reasons. (1) Epigraphic evidence—the inscriptions naming Aurelia Oppia and Herakleia as well as the inscription referring to Plutarch's associate Clea (discussed below)—attests to the fact that, historically, some female philosophers (or at least philosophical

66 Most of our knowledge of Hypatia comes from three late antique sources (given here in chronological order): Socrates' *Ecclesiastical History* (written ca. 450 AD), Damascius' *Philosophical History* or *Life of Isidore* (early sixth century AD), and the *Chronicle* of the seventh century Coptic bishop John of Nikiu. The latter only survives in a seventeenth century Ethiopic translation made from an Arabic translation.

67 See Layne (2019).

68 Layne (2019) emphasises that "[t]he stain of "mysticism" (and all the gendered/racial derogatory connotations of this term) haunts not merely the reception of the Neoplatonic tradition in general, but its erasure further contributes to the neglect of Hypatia's philosophical sisters."

women) *were* also priestesses. (2) Religious ideas and practices were crucial to and formed a significant element of the Platonic tradition, and most especially of Neoplatonism, and Neoplatonist philosophers from Plotinus onwards claimed that the goal of philosophy was assimilation to the divine, taking their cue from Plato's *Theaetetus* (176b) which had linked "becoming like a god as far as possible" (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) with the acquisition of virtue and wisdom.[69] Furthermore, within Neoplatonism, we see the development and flourishing of theurgy in the third and fourth centuries AD. Finally, (3) religion was possibly the only public arena within which women had considerable power and their voices could be heard and were respected.[70] In particular, religious office (priestess or seer at a religious sanctuary) presented the one arena in which Greek and Roman women assumed roles equal and comparable to those of men.[71]

Within the Platonic tradition, Diotima stands at the forefront in her characterisation as the wise prophetess, priestess, and an initiator into the mystery cults.[72] As discussed earlier, there is a widespread assumption that Diotima is a literary fiction. Yet Plato presents Diotima as a priestess from a precise geographical location—Mantinea in Arcadia—and makes Socrates claim that she held off the plague from Athens for ten years.[73] This type of ritual action reflects the historical tradition of Athenians seeking help from diviners when anticipating pestilence and is historically plausible.[74] In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates claims that he learnt many things "from priests and priestesses who have studied so as to be able to give a reasoned account of their ministry" (οἱ μὲν λέγοντές εἰσι τῶν ἱερέων τε καὶ τῶν ἱερειῶν ὅσοις μεμέληκε περὶ ὧν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οἵοις τ' εἶναι διδόναι).[75] Debra Nails' assessment that "… the reasons to regard a Man-

69 Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b; Plotinus, *Enn*. 1.2.1, 3–10; 1.8.6, 9–17.

70 Cavarero (1995, 94 n. 3), Connelly (2007), Katz (2000, 514–515).

71 See Connelly (2007, 2, 219–221).

72 Plato, *Smp*. 201d3–5; 206b. It is widely recognized that Diotima's speech (201d–212c) is replete with terminology from the Eleusinian mysteries—its structure imitates the pattern of those mysteries: cf. for example, Riedwig (1987, 5–14).

73 Plato, *Smp*. 201d3–5. Cf. Nails (2015, 74).

74 See pseudo-Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution* 1: Epimenides of Crete purifies Athens on the condition that the Alcmaeonids be banished forever, following a guilty verdict against them for sacrilege; Plato, *Laws* 1.642d3–e4, states that Epimenides obeyed the command of an oracle to go to Athens to make certain sacrifices on behalf of the Athenians, but in this account he is moved forward by a century to postpone the Persian invasion for ten years. Cf. Nails (2015, 74–75). Levin (1975, 235–237) adduces the ten year postponement and other evidence to undermine the view that Diotima was fictitious.

75 Plato, *Meno* 81a10–b1. Cf. also 81a5–6.

tinean priestess known to Socrates as having actually existed outweigh those for treating her as Plato's invention" seems right on the mark here.[76]

For example, when considering Diotima's historical existence, many scholars have commented that Plato could never have met this foreign woman, otherwise absent from the historical record, and purported to have known Socrates before Plato was born. Debra Nails notes that this is an especially weak defense of fictionality as a fallacious argument from silence, especially when applied to a non-Athenian female, since Plato writes vivid accounts of others, such as Parmenides and Zeno, whom he could only have known by reputation.[77]

Since Diotima is presented as a priestess, it is certainly possible that Diotima and Socrates might have conversed philosophically in some fashion at a religious festival or some other religious occasion in Athens. Furthermore, the religious customs of the Mantineans were legendary and well-known in antiquity: Herodotus tells us that Egyptian rites were taught to women of the Peloponnese by the daughters of Danaus; later, the rites were preserved by the Mantineans from Arcadia, after the Dorians drove the rest of the Peloponnesians out.[78] We also have epigraphic and archaeological evidence for priestesses and prophetesses in Mantinea, including a large relief (dated 425–400 B.C.) found in the agora at Mantineia depicting a priestess holding a liver in her hands to represent the act of haruspicy; the presence of the palm tree in the background evokes Apollo and his oracular powers: several interpreters have associated this relief with Diotima although the association is conjectural.[79]

Clea is the addressee and dedicatee of several of Plutarch's works, including *Virtues in Women*, which Clea had requested from Plutarch in order to show that virtue is the same in women and men, and *On Isis and Osiris*, where we learn that Clea was a priestess—and thus a colleague of Plutarch's, who was a priest at Delphi—as well as a philosopher.[80] In this work, Plutarch describes Clea as the leader of the Thyiades (ἀρχηίδα … τῶν Θυιάδων) at Delphi and as an initiate in the mysteries of Osiris, as well as a priestess of Isis.[81] *On Isis and Osiris* is one

76 Nails (2015, 73).

77 Nails (2015, 74) who states that "the preponderance of evidence is that the characters in Plato's dialogues were flesh-and-blood human beings", noting that 84 people speak in direct and indirect discourse in Plato's works and, of these, only two are otherwise unknown: Diotima and Philebus.

78 Cf. Herodotus 2.171; Nails (2015, 74).

79 Marble funerary relief from Mantineia. Athens National Archaeological Museum 226. Cf. Connelly (2002, 146–147, 238–240), Nails, (2015, 75).

80 Plutarch, *Virtues in Women* 242f–243a; *On Isis and Osiris* 351e10, 352c2–8.

81 Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 351e, 364e. Cf. Griffiths (1970, 95–96, 253–254, 431) argues that Plutarch's use of the term καθωσιωμένην ('consecrated') implies priesthood rather than ini-

of Plutarch's most ambitious philosophical works and assumes Clea's knowledge not only of the Isis cult and myth but of basic philosophical concepts.[82] In *Virtues in Women*, Plutarch refers to Clea's deep familiarity with books and to the long philosophical conversation they had after the death of Clea's relative, Leontis.[83] Plutarch's explicit statements and the intellectual sophistication of the two treatises suggest that Clea had an impressive level of education, equivalent to that of Plutarch's male readers.[84]

Clea (or possibly her granddaughter) is attested in the epigraphic record, in two inscriptions from Delphi: one dates from the time of Antoninus Pius (AD 138–161) and refers to "Flavia Clea, the leader (of the Thyiades)" (Φλαουία Κλέα, ἡ ἀρχηΐς), while in another (dated to the latter half of the reign of Hadrian AD 117–138) the same Flavia Clea dedicates the statue of her mother, Memmia Eurydice, the latter of whom is identical with Plutarch's student whom he addresses in his *Advice to the Bride and Groom*.[85] Thus, Clea (Plutarch's addressee) was either the mother of Eurydice or her husband Pollianus or their daughter, since grandmother and granddaughter bore the same name, following the usual Greek custom.[86]

As discussed above, the philosopher Sosipatra, attested in Eunapius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, emerged from among Iamblichus' successors although she was allegedly taught Chaldean wisdom as a child by Chaldean priests. Sosipatra is presented as a prophetess and theurgist, as well as a philosopher who ran her own philosophical school; she displays the ability to know the future and events from a distance—her words are described by Eunapius as 'oracular' and she is characterized as a 'divine woman' throughout the biography.[87]

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tiation as an ordinary worshipper, suggesting that Clea was a priestess of Isis and Osiris, as well as a priestess of Dionysos as leader of the Thyiades. At 351e, Plutarch states that Clea "serves" (θεραπεύεις) Isis, probably denoting a priesthood.

82 Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 351e6–f2, 354b13–c6, 354f9–13, 370d2–371a5. 373e7–f5. Cf. Stadter, "Philosophos", 173–174; Pomeroy (1999, 34–35).

83 Plutarch, *Virtues of Women* 242f5–243a3, 243d9–11. Cf. Swain (1999, 92).

84 Cf. Stadter (1999, 173–174).

85 Cf. *SEG* 1.159; Jannoray (1946, 254–259), Griffiths (1970, 17, 95–96), Pomeroy (1999, 42–43). Memmia Eurydice: see Plutarch, *Advice to the Bride and Groom*, Prologue, 145a–146 f.

86 This is a contested issue given the chronology involved: Pomeroy (1999, 34, 42) notes that Plutarch's addressee is perhaps the daughter of Eurydice and Pollianus mentioned in the two inscriptions but is more likely to be Eurydice's mother; Stadter, "Philosophos", 173–174, argues that Plutarch's addressee was the mother of Pollianus and the mother-in-law of Memmia Eurydice; Jannoray (1946, 256) argues for the identification of Plutarch's addressee with the Flavia Clea of the two Delphic inscriptions and this view is followed by Swain (1999, 92).

87 Cf. Addey (1017, 144–161), Johnston (2012, 99–117).

Within the Athenian School of Neoplatonism, we hear of Asclepigeneia, daughter of Plutarch of Athens—the founder of the Athenian School. When Marinus describes Proclus' proficiency in theurgy, he states:

> καὶ γὰρ ταῦτα παρειλήφει, καὶ τὰς ἐκφωνήσεις καὶ τὴν ἄλλην χρῆσιν αὐτῶν μεμαθήκει παρὰ Ἀσκληπιγενείας τῆς Πλουτάρχου θυγατρός. παρ' αὐτῇ γὰρ καὶ μόνῃ ἐσώζετο ἀπὸ Νεστορίου τοῦ μεγάλου ὄργια καὶ ἡ σύμπασα θεουργικὴ ἀγωγὴ διὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῇ παραδοθεῖσα
>
> … from Asclepigeneia, the daughter of Plutarch, he [i.e. Proclus] learned the invocations and the rest of the apparatus. For she alone preserved the rituals, and the whole process of theurgy, handed on to her from the great Nestorius by her father.[88]

Asclepigenia received her theurgic training from her father and from Nestorius, who was also a seer and the hierophant of the Eleusinian mystery cult.[89] Asclepigenia is presented here as the expert theurgist and priestess in the Athenian School. Like Sosipatra, Asclepigenia must have been an extremely proficient philosopher in order to have become an expert theurgist, since the practice of theurgy presupposes the study of philosophy, both prior to and in tandem with ritual practice. Her transmission of the invocations and ritual procedures to Proclus, which she had received from her father, entails female to male transmission of ritual and philosophical expertise (similar to that of Sosipatra) modelled on Diotima's bestowal of initiatory knowledge to Socrates in the *Symposium*.

As mentioned above, Hypatia has traditionally been seen as a philosopher who taught an old-fashioned type of Platonism little influenced by Iamblichus; she is characterised as a mathematician and scientist who had little to do with the religious aspects of Neoplatonism.[90] Recently, Alan Cameron and Jacqueline Long have argued that Hypatia and her father Theon were adepts of Iamblichean Neoplatonism, well versed in the Chaldean wisdom which was considered to underlie theurgy.[91] Their argument is convincing. The *Suda* entries attesting to Hypatia's writings imply her expertise in astronomy and astrology, which were generally considered synonymous in antiquity, in addi-

88 Marinus, *Procl.* 28, 12–15.

89 Nestorius: cf. Addey (2014, 54, 280 n. 181). Cf. Marinus, *Procl.* 29, 3–27, for Proclus' curing of Asclepigenia's granddaughter; s.v. 'Asclépigéneia' in Goulet (1989, 625–626).

90 See Rist (1965, 219–221).

91 Cameron and Long (1993, 50–59).

tion to mathematics and philosophy.[92] Certainly the interest in theurgic ritual and divination, especially the *Chaldean Oracles* and dream divination, displayed by Synesius, Hypatia's pupil, is extremely suggestive.[93] Hypatia's work in astronomy, which implies her expertise in astrology as well, also points in this direction. Synesius claims that Hypatia taught him how to make an astrolabe, an instrument associated with astrology, and describes Hypatia's "oracular utterance".[94] The modern objection that Hypatia's expertise in science and mathematics excludes interest in theurgy is anachronistic, since almost every Neoplatonist philosopher combined scientific and philosophical erudition with mystical or theurgic expertise.[95] On this basis, Hypatia too may have been an example of the theurgist-philosopher, priestess as well as philosopher, although the evidence is somewhat inconclusive. As Danielle Layne has noted, "insofar as the evidence for or against her [i.e. Hypatia's] relationship to theurgy is ambiguous, we should [...] ask what is at stake in maintaining the narrative that Hypatia is clearly a contemplative/rational philosopher who *certainly* rejected the theurgic/mystical aspects of Platonism? Male philosophers and historians have constructed a story about her as the beautiful icon of what they deem as worthy of honor, of what they believe earns a woman a place in the [philosophical] canon."[96]

5 Female Philosophers and Textual Transmission

The paucity and apparent lack of extant writings authored by women, including female philosophers, raises important questions about women's philosophical activity in antiquity: How frequently did they write philosophical works? Is the lack of surviving female-authored writings primarily due to the fact that

92 Rist (1993, 216), Dzielska (1995, 54). The fact that the *Suda* describes her as mathematician and philosopher (rather than theurgist) is irrelevant here, since the *Suda* describes Iamblichus, possibly the most well-known advocate of theurgy, as a 'philosopher' and 'student of Porphyry the philosopher', without mentioning theurgy.

93 Synesius, *De insomniis* 135b, 140b. Cf. Bregman (1982, 145–154), Dzielska (1995, 63), Ronchey (1994, 180–184), Deakin (1994, 63–65).

94 Synesius and the astrolabe: *De dono* 311a; Hypatia's "oracular utterance": *Ep*. 5, 305–308. Cf. *Ep*. 137.8–9; Cameron and Long (1993, 55), Dzielska (1995, 47–48, 54), Ronchey (1994, 180–181), Deakin (1994, 78–79). Cameron and Long (1993, 51–52), also suggest that Sosipatra's son, Antoninus, who moved to Alexandria and had theurgic talent, may have taught Hypatia, providing a direct link between Iamblichus and Hypatia. Cf. Eunapius, *vs* 471–473.

95 Bregman (1982, 20), Cameron and Long (1993, 52–53), Dzielska (1995, 54).

96 Layne (2019).

women did not write philosophical works or is it related to processes surrounding textual transmission? I will argue here that the small number of extant philosophical works or writings that can be attributed to ancient women is related much more closely to later processes of textual transmission and views of women within the medieval Christian tradition of the Latin West and the Arabic tradition in the East, rather than to female philosophical activity in antiquity *per se*.

First, it seems important to examine what we actually know of the female authoring of texts, especially philosophical works, in antiquity. Ancient sources attributed a great variety of subjects to female authors, including philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, musical theory, poetry (especially lyric poetry), social commentary, political advice, theology and more.[97] The Greek and Roman physicians Galen and Soranos acknowledged that some of their medical practices and understanding stemmed from the work of female doctors. Galen attributed various remedies to individual women writers on medical subjects—Kleopatra, Fabulla, Maia, Samithra and Xanite.[98] Although we have some literary works authored by female poets and writers, such as the poems of Sappho and Corinna, many of the works attributed to women in these diverse subject areas are known only from brief quotations (i.e. fragments preserved in the work of other authors) or references by others.[99] For example, Porphyry, in his *Commentary on the Harmonics of Ptolemy*, cites the work of Ptolemaïs, a female music theorist from Cyrene who had written a work entitled *The Pythagorean Principles of Music*.[100] Porphyry does not offer any comment on Ptolemaïs' gender or treat her as unusual.[101] It is unclear whether Ptolemaïs should be categorised as a philosopher as well as a music theorist—but the title and fragments of her work indicate her interest in Pythagoreanism, and she is generally considered to be a Neopythagorean.[102] Ptolemaïs' knowledge of the canonic theory indicates that she had a firm grasp of mathematics.[103]

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97 Cf. Vivante (2007, 155–173) on women's philosophical writings (especially 155). Plant (2004, 1) notes that we have the names of approximately 100 Greek and Roman women writers; about 3,200 writers are included in the canon of Greek authors (*TLG*).

98 Vivante (2007, 155).

99 Cf. Snyder (1989, ix—x), Plant (2004, 6) notes that only one complete poem by Sappho survives from the nine books of her work that existed in antiquity.

100 Ptolemaïs' dates are uncertain but her work must have been written between the fourth century B.C. and the first century AD: cf. Barker (1989, 230), Plant (2004, 87–89).

101 Barker (1989, 230), Pomeroy (1999, 42, 51).

102 Cf. Barker (1989, 230) who notes that in the fragments of her work, Ptolemaïs seems to prefer the approach of Aristoxenus to that of Pythagoras in her discussion of different positions on harmonic theory. On her status as a Neopythagorean, see Plant (2004, 87), Pomeroy (2013, 42, 95–96).

103 Pomeroy (2013, 95).

It seems that many works written by women were already—in antiquity itself—not circulated widely, not preserved or only partially preserved. For example, within the Roman context, written copies of the rousing speech composed and delivered by Hortensia in the Roman Forum in 42 B.C. were extremely popular and widely distributed, but only a late Greek version (preserved in Appian in the late first or early second century AD) exists.[104] However, a much more central factor may relate to later processes of textual transmission and views of women within the medieval Christian tradition of the Latin West and the Arabic tradition in the East, rather than to female philosophical activity in and of itself. Both of these traditions transmitted our philosophical texts via the transcription and reproduction of manuscripts; thus, the survival of ancient texts often relates to what was considered important to preserve in medieval Byzantium or Baghdad. Since both the medieval Christian and Arabic traditions' views of women, especially in terms of their intellectual abilities, were often derogatory, there may well have been little interest in preserving and transcribing the texts of women, or a view that women could not have authored such texts.[105] There is certainly evidence (discussed below in relation to Hypatia) that certain philosophical texts authored by women may have later been attributed to male philosophers or transmitted anonymously without attribution.

Hypatia and her writings are a useful case study to illustrate some of the methodological issues pertaining to the survival—or lack thereof—of philosophical works authored by women. Later authorities tended to minimize her contribution and placed her in the role of scribe to her father, but recent mathematical and philological research has shown that she worked in collaboration with her father and seems to have played a much larger role in producing philosophical texts than previously recognized.[106] We know more

104 See Vivante (2007, 155), Snyder (1989, 125–112), Plant (2004, 3).

105 This point is obviously a generalization which merits further examination in relation to specific historical contexts relating to processes of textual transmission. One factor that demonstrates the demotion of status of women in both the Arabic and Christian medieval traditions in comparison with the Greco-Roman milieu is the fact that women could not hold priestly offices within the former traditions during the medieval period. Cf. Snyder (1989, 100) who states: "… during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, philosophical inquiry became almost exclusively a male province; no doubt, monks and scholars had little interest in copying or studying the works of obscure female philosophers, whose minds (according to the prevailing Aristotelian doctrine) would by nature have been inferior to those of their male counterparts anyway."

106 Rome, "Commentaires", cxvii—cxxi, the editor of Theon's *Commentary on the Almagest*, argued that Hypatia revised or edited Theon's work. Cf. Cameron (1990, 107–108, 126),

about Hypatia's writings than those of other ancient female philosophers. According to the *Suda*:

> ἔγραψεν ὑπόμνημα εἰς Διόφαντον, τὸν ἀστρονομικὸν Κανόνα, εἰς τὰ Κωνικὰ Ἀπολλωνίου ὑπόμνημα.
>
> She wrote a *Commentary on Diophantus*, the *Astronomical Canon*, *Commentary on Apollonius' Conic Sections*.
>
> *Suda*, s.v. Hypatia, l. 3–5

That is to say, Hypatia wrote commentaries on the *Arithmetica* of Diophantus of Alexandria (second or third century AD) and on Apollonius of Perge's *Conic Sections* (third century BC). She also wrote on the astronomical canon: most scholars have followed Paul Tannery and inserted an εἰς ("on"), construing this as ⟨a commentary on⟩ the *Astronomical Canon*.[107] This might refer to a commentary on Ptolemy's *Handy Tables* (πρόχειροι κανόνες τῆς ἀστρονομίας), a revised and expanded edition of the astronomical tables contained in his *Almagest*.[108] However, the word 'commentary' is not given for the *Astronomical Canon* in the Suda entry, whereas it is explicitly given for the other two works by Hypatia. This suggests that the middle entry is just the title of her book: *Astronomical Canon*.[109]

Now, the *Handy Tables* do not survive in Ptolemy's original edition but in a version which in modern times is widely attributed to Theon, Hypatia's father. However, the attribution is not attested in any MS—and nor does Theon himself refer to any such edition or redaction in any of his commentaries.[110] On this basis, and owing to the fact that Theon's interprets Ptolemy's own calculations in an improbable way that suggests he did not check the figures, Alan Cameron has argued that we can infer that it was Hypatia who edited this text.[111] Further support for this comes from the subtitle to Book 3 of Theon's *Commentary on the Almagest*:

Cameron and Long (1993, 44–49); my analysis of the possible survival of some of Hypatia's writings draws heavily on and is indebted to these important works.

107 Cf. Cameron and Long (1993, 44).

108 Rist (1965, 216), Cameron and Long, "Barbarians", 44 and n. 134, 58–60; Dzielska, "Hypatia", 71–73; Deakin, "Hypatia", 43–44. Cameron and Long (1993, 44) note that all the relevant Suda entries relating to this work give the word 'Canon' in the singular. So, for example, Suda s.v.Πάππος: ὁ γράψας εἰς τὸν Πτολεμαίου κανόνα; s.v. Θέων: εἰς τὸν τοῦ Πτεολεμαίου κανόνα; s.v. Πτολεμαῖος: κανόνα πρόχειρον.

109 Cameron and Long (1993, 44–45).

110 Cameron and Long (1993, 45).

111 Cameron and Long (1993, 45).

> Θέωνος Ἀλεξανδρέως εἰς τὸ τρίτον τῆς μαθεματικῆς Πτολεμαίου Συντάξεως ὑπόμνημα. ἐκδοσεως παραναγνωσθείσης τῃ φιλοσόφῳ θυγατρί μου Ὑπατία.
>
> Commentary by Theon of Alexandria on the third book of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, edition revised by my daughter, the philosopher Hypatia.[112]

It has been assumed that it was *Theon's Commentary* that Hypatia revised.[113] Yet a major issue with this interpretation is the use of the Greek term ἐκδοσις, which refers to an 'edition', 'publication' or 'translation' rather than 'commentary.'[114] The sub-headings for Books 1 and 2 of Theon's *Commentary*, which do not mention Hypatia, suggest the solution:

> Θέωνος Ἀλεξανδρέως τῆς παρ' αὐτοῦ γεγενημένης ἐκδοσεως εἰς τὸ πρῶτον (Book 2: δεύτερον) τῆς Συντάξεως Πτολεμαίου ὑπόμνημα.
>
> Commentary by Theon of Alexandria on his own edition of the first (second) book of Ptolemy's *Almagest*.[115]

The editor of Theon's commentary claims that this is Theon's original edition, in contrast to Hypatia's.[116] However, Cameron argues that, when writing books 1 and 2, Theon had not yet written book 3, much less seen it revised by Hypatia. Furthermore, it makes no sense for Theon to speak of a commentary on his own edition (since one's own books are always in one's own edition), unless the rest of the edition was edited by Hypatia herself.[117] Thus, we can extrapo-

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112 Theon, *Commentary on the Almagest* III, ed. Rome.

113 Theon's editor, Rome, looked in vain for linguistic differences between Book 3 and other books: see "Commentaires", cxvi—cxxi.

114 *LSJ* s.v. ἔκδοσις; s.v. ὑπόμνημα which refers to 'notes' or a 'commentary' on a published work. Cameron, "Isidore", 112, notes that in the lexicon of the scholar, ἔκδοσις usually denotes the edition of a text, while ὑπόμνημα refers to a commentary on the text, and that this is how Theon normally used the terms. For example, Theon, *Commentary on the Almagest*, Book 1 492, 6–8 (ed. Rome) states: "That sectors of equal circles are to one another as the angles on which they stand, I have proved in my *edition* of [Euclid's] *Elements* (δέδεικται ἡμῖν ἐν τῇ ἐκδόσει τῶν Στοιχείων) at the end of the sixth book" (my italics for emphasis). We know that Theon did not write a commentary on Euclid, but he did edit the text of Euclid's *Elements*.

115 Theon, *Commentary on the Almagest*, ed. Rome. Cf. Cameron, "Isidore", 111–112.

116 Rome, "Commentaires", 317 n. 1.

117 Cameron (1990, 112), Cameron and Long (1993, 46) who compare the parallel in the headings to the works of an early sixth-century commentator on the same sorts of texts, Eutocius of Ascalon.

late that the first two books of the edition of Ptolemy's *Almagest* were edited by Theon but Book 3, and almost certainly the rest of the work (Books 4–13), was edited by Hypatia, while Theon wrote the commentary on the text.[118] This suggests that Hypatia actually composed the bulk of the edition of Ptolemy's *Almagest* later attributed to her father Theon. As Alan Cameron surmises: "Far from Hypatia's works being entirely lost, we may have more than 1,000 pages of Greek edited by her. The 'large number of interpolations' recently detected in the *Almagest* by G.J. Toomer may be in the main Hypatia's work."[119]

Furthermore, it is possible that a later Arabic translation of certain sections of Hypatia's *Commentary on the Arithmetica of Diophantus* actually survives. Of the thirteen original books of Diophantus' *Arithmetica*, only six survive in Greek.[120] But we now know that at least four books survived until ca. 860 AD and were translated at that point into Arabic—an Arabic MS has been found of Books 4–7 which seems to follow on from the Greek text of Books 1–3.[121] Moreover the Arabic text is an expanded version of Diophantus' text, which incorporates verifications of his demonstrations, alternative resolutions and interpolated problems.[122] The purpose of these expansions was to make a difficult text easier to follow. Either the translator incorporated into his text material from an elementary exegetical commentary or the text he translated had already been amplified in this way. Either way, the obvious candidate for this amplified Greek original is Hypatia, the only known ancient commentator on Diophantus.[123] This raises the possibility that some of Hypatia's own writings (i.e. her commentary on Diophantus) were transmitted via the Arabic tradition without attribution to her. Thus, great caution needs to be exercised in relation to any assessment of the lack and non-survival of female-authored philosophical writings. Textual transmission and processes in subsequent eras needs to be considered alongside ancient evidence for lost works, and, in a methodological

118 Cameron (1990, 114–115). According to Rome, "Commentaires", II 318 n. 1 (the only scholar who has looked at the MSS. for the rest of the commentary) there are no more subheadings to Books IV–XIII, which means we cannot be certain that Hypatia edited the text of the remaining ten books. However, as Cameron (1990, 115) argues, "the natural assumption is that Theon found the task of both text and commentary too much for him, and persuaded Hypatia to take over the text for the rest of the project."

119 Cameron and Long (1993, 48), Toomer (1984, 4–5, 27 n. 1, 27–32).

120 Rashed (1984, ix), Cameron and Long (1993, 48).

121 Diophantus, *Arithmetica*, ed. Rashed, *Diophante. Les Arithmétiques* Vols. III–IV.

122 Sesiano, "Diophantus' *Arithmetica*", 48–57, 68–73 in Cameron and Long "Barbarians", 48 n. 156; Rashed, "Diophante", lix—lxxx.

123 Sesiano (1982) (the first editor of the Arabic translation) points out that Hypatia is the most obvious candidate for these expanded sections of the work (in Cameron and Long, 1993, 48).

sense, we need to remain cautious about later views of women and female intellectual abilities and their possible impact on the survival of female-authored works.

6 Conclusion

The overall picture emerging from extant evidence (epigraphic, biographical and philosophical works) suggests that the women attested within these sources of evidence are fragments of a much wider picture of fairly consistent female activity within the Platonic tradition, especially if we admit the significance of women's religious roles in antiquity and the importance of religion within the Platonic tradition, although levels of involvement almost certainly diverged in relation to specific chronological, educational and geographical contexts and are difficult to ascertain with any certainty. It is important to remain cautious in our assessments of ancient female philosophical activity. "Arguments from silence" have mostly been used to deny the historical existence of female philosophers and to minimise or entirely elide ancient female philosophical activity. However, there is at least one methodological problem with this approach: the absence of evidence for female-authored texts may relate to ancient and medieval (patriarchal) views of women's intellectual abilities and to the lack of focus on, and attention paid to, preserving, disseminating and circulating their work or recording their activities. Thus, the importance of investigating ancient and medieval processes of textual transmission and considering the possible ramifications of these processes for the survival of female-authored writings is paramount. An examination of epigraphic, archaeological and papyrological forms of evidence alongside and in conjunction with historical, literary and philosophical texts is also vital in order to attain a balanced picture of female philosophical activity, and can act as a significant corrective to approaches which solely consider literary evidence.

It also seems vital to make our definitions of—and assumptions about—what constitutes 'philosophy' and 'philosophical' content and activity explicit, as well as defining who counts as a 'philosopher' when analyzing the roles and significance of women engaging with philosophy in antiquity. It seems especially crucial to ensure that our definitions of 'philosophy' are broad and inclusive—with the recognition that what counts as 'philosophy' is subject to historical shifts and changes over time—so as not to exclude ancient women from the history of philosophy because they do not fit in with our modern ideas about the philosophical canon. In relation to this, the crucial importance of examining and taking into account the religious roles and functions of female

philosophers associated with the Platonic tradition (and most especially Neoplatonism) cannot be overstated. The prevalence of religious aspects in the depiction of ancient female philosophers, especially in late antiquity, is also linked with issues of transmission, since some late antique female philosophers were also theurgists in the fourth century AD or later, at a time when theurgy was disappearing 'underground' due to increasing Christianisation and the corresponding legal and social prohibitions against divination, sacrifice and other practices associated with theurgy and traditional Graeco-Roman religions.[124] In order to obtain a well-rounded and balanced picture of female philosophers and their intellectual abilities, it is crucial to consider these methodological issues.

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124 Denzey Lewis (2014 274–297).

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PART 2

The Status of Women in Neoplatonic Socio-political Theory

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CHAPTER 2

Women in Plotinus

James Wilberding

Introduction

Given that Plotinus saw himself as a committed torchbearer of Plato's philosophy, the notorious level of ambivalence we find in Plato raises serious questions about Plotinus' own attitude toward women. We can hardly afford to go through all the relevant passages in the dialogues here, but the following selection serves to highlight some of the most prominent points that may be raised in this connection. On the positive side, there is first and foremost the celebrated philosopher-queens thesis of the *Republic* and its various corollaries: that women do not differ in their natures, i.e., in their souls, from men; and that they therefore should benefit from the same education program; and that rather than staying at home raising the children, they should be awarded the same professions and roles in the city.[1] And there is Plato's decision to introduce Diotima as the source of Socrates' theory of love and the ascent to the Beautiful in the *Symposium*. Despite the overwhelming preponderance of male interlocutors in the *Corpus Platonicum*, it is this sole female who is characterized as being most knowledgeable about Plato's epistemological summit.[2] Finally, there is the historical fact that Plato appears to have welcomed women into his Academy.[3] On the negative side there is certainly much more to discuss, especially in terms of his unabashed focus on male life and certain passing remarks about women, but there are two particularly striking theses that warrant special attention here. There is the regrettable reincarnation thesis of the *Timaeus*, according to which being reincarnated as a woman is the price paid for failing to live a good life as a male, with the female human life being ranked in between the male human life and a descending series of animal lives.[4] And finally there is Plato's application of gendered labels to his metaphysics, most conspicuously again in the *Timaeus*, where by labeling the Receptacle the 'mother' of becom-

1 See especially *R.* 451d–457c, summarized in *Ti.* 18c–d.
2 *Smp.* 201d–212c.
3 See Diogenes Laertius III 46.
4 *Ti.* 42b–c.

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ing, Plato effectively establishes associations between femaleness on the one hand and passivity, emptiness and need on the other.

My aim in this chapter is to argue that Plotinus is much less ambivalent and much more positive in his attitude toward women than Plato. This is largely due to a conscious effort that Plotinus makes to reject by argument and exegesis several prominent misogynistic theses that he inherits from his predecessors in the philosophical tradition. As I shall show in the first two sections, Plotinus is concerned to free the concept of the female from both of the negative theses about women he inherits from Plato's dialogues—the regrettable reincarnation thesis on the one hand and the metaphysical correlation between femaleness and the poverty of the receptacle on the other. And in a third section, I shall show that Plotinus' engagement with traditional myths also reveals a similar concern for avoiding negative theses about women, which becomes particularly clear in his dealing with Hesiod's notoriously misogynistic tale of Pandora. Nevertheless, there are some limits to Plotinus' positive attitude towards women and the female in the *Enneads*, which I shall outline at the conclusion of the paper.

1 The Regrettable Reincarnation Thesis

Let us begin with the regrettable reincarnation thesis. Before turning to Plotinus, we would do well to remind ourselves that although Plato does appear to be committed to the transmigration of souls, he does not commit himself to the details of any one theory. Instead, we find a variety of transmigration theories in the dialogues. For example, whereas some dialogues (*Timaeus, Phaedrus, Phaedo*, and *Laws*) describe the details of the next life as externally determined entirely by considerations of justice, in the *Republic* the individual souls themselves choose their next life. Likewise, in some dialogues (*Meno, Phaedo, Laws, Phaedrus*) there is no mention of sexual differences at all, and although sexual differences are included in the *Republic*'s account of transmigration, Plato does not say here that female lives are in any way inferior to male lives, which is perhaps to be expected given that the *Republic* is also the locus of the philosopher-queens thesis. Thus, the regrettable claim that being reincarnated as a human female is a punishment for cowardly and unjust human males (and perhaps a reward for well-behaved birds) is thankfully limited to the *Timaeus*. So, when it comes to developing his own theory of transmigration, Plotinus has options, and he chooses to exclude this thesis from his theory. He never unambiguously addresses the thesis, and it is possible that his strategy is just to pass over it in silence (but see below). This might seem like a surprising tactic given the prominence of the *Timaeus* in Plotinus' thought, but elsewhere

Plotinus shows himself capable of distinguishing between the dialogue's literary figure Timaeus and Plato,[5] so perhaps he saw this passage as an appropriate place to avail himself of this distinction again, without bothering to do so in his published writings, in order to drive a wedge of sorts between the regrettable reincarnation thesis and Plato's genuine theory of reincarnation.

Be that as it may, the regrettable reincarnation thesis is clearly not part of Plotinus' theory. This deserves some emphasis because Plotinus' theory of transmigration is often said to be one of the more controversial topics of his philosophy,[6] yet whatever controversy there may be is limited to his level of commitment to the thesis that human souls are reincarnated in animal bodies. There can be no doubt that the reincarnation of human souls into male and female human bodies remains a solid part of Plotinus' anthropology.

In all of the passages in the *Enneads* concerning transmigration,[7] there is only one that even mentions sexual differences, and this passage deserves our full attention:

> It is certainly not by chance that a person becomes a slave nor does one just happen to become a prisoner or be abused physically (ὑβρισθῆναι εἰς σῶμα) for no reason, but a person who was once the perpetrator of what he now finds himself suffering. Someone who once murdered his mother will become a woman and be murdered by her child, and one who has violated a woman (βιασάμενος γυναῖκα) will become a woman to be violated in turn. Hence, we have the name 'Adrasteia' ('inescapability') by divine decree.[8] For this ordering of things is truly Adrastreia and truly justice and a most wondrous wisdom.[9]

Here we find Plotinus advancing what we might describe as an act-based, *lex talionis* doctrine of karma. The details of one's next reincarnation are laid down by the salient immoral actions one performs in this life such that one may suf-

5 See *Enn.* 2.1.6, 6–8, with my note in Wilberding (2006, ad loc).

6 For a recent study of the topic with some references to previous scholarship, see Stamatellos (2013).

7 See *Enn.* 1.1, 11–12; 2.9.6, 10–28; 3.2.4; 3.2.13; 3.2.15; 3.4.2; 3.4.5; 4.3.9, 5–6; 4.3.24; 4.7.14; 4.8.1; 5.7.1; and 6.4.16.

8 Scholars generally see this as a reference to Plato *Phaedrus* 248c2.

9 3.2.12, 11–17, Gerson et al. translation. Μὴ γὰρ δὴ κατὰ συντυχίαν δοῦλον μηδὲ αἰχμάλωτον ὡς ἔτυχε μηδὲ ὑβρισθῆναι εἰς σῶμα εἰκῇ, ἀλλ' ἦν ποτε ταῦτα ποιήσας, ἃ νῦν ἐστι πάσχων· καὶ μητέρα τις ἀνελὼν ὑπὸ παιδὸς ἀναιρεθήσεται γενόμενος γυνή, καὶ βιασάμενος γυναῖκα ἔσται, ἵνα βιασθῇ. Ὅθεν καὶ θείᾳ φήμῃ Ἀδράστεια· αὕτη γὰρ ἡ διάταξις Ἀδράστεια ὄντως καὶ ὄντως Δίκη καὶ σοφία θαυμαστή.

fer these same actions in the next life.[10] This is certainly not the place for an extensive discussion of Plotinus' views on providence and fate or retributive punishment, but what is important to the present study is how far removed this is from the thesis of the *Timaeus*. It is even possible to see this passage as Plotinus' attempt at a substantive interpretive revision of the *Timaeus* passage: it is only *specific* acts of cowardice and injustice by men, namely those that victimize women, that demand female reincarnation. And this is not because a female life is *per se* a punishment. Rather, in this passage Plotinus is arguably acknowledging the special nature of certain crimes committed against women, and his demand for female reincarnation in these cases presumably stems from his belief that the experiences of these female victims are in some sense incommensurable with the experiences of male victims of otherwise comparable crimes.

Thus, on Plotinus' understanding of cosmic retribution, these male criminals must literally become women in order to experience the kind of wrongs they have inflicted on others. If this is right, Plotinus is not simply passing over the regrettable reincarnation thesis but actively revising it in a way that purges it of its contempt for female lives. Either way, the above has shown that there is no evidence of the regrettable reincarnation thesis in Plotinus' theory of transmigration.

2 The Maternal-Material Thesis

As noted above, the most conspicuous instance of Plato applying gendered language to metaphysics is found in the *Timaeus*, where the Demiurge, who personifies intelligence and goodness and is responsible for the rational creative activity of bestowing form, is repeatedly characterized as a "father" (28c3, 37c7, 41a7, 42e7, 50d3, 71d5), whereas the label "mother" is applied to the receptacle (ὑποδοχή) of becoming (50d3, 51a4–5). This receptacle is described largely in terms of passivity and emptiness: it is the "space" (χώρα 52a8), itself "totally devoid of any forms" (πάντων ἐκτὸς εἰδῶν 50e4) and "characterless" (ἄμορφον 51a7), in which the Demiurge executes his creation. In fact, there is even a suggestion that the receptacle is worse than merely passive, as it reacts to forms with an irregular swaying and shaking motion (52e3–5). Since later Platonists understood this receptacle to be a kind of matter (even though Plato himself never uses the term 'matter'), I shall be referring to this as the maternal-material thesis.

10 See also 4.3.24.

The maternal-material thesis would seem to be a metaphysical instantiation of a particular theory of sexual reproduction, according to which the male is effectively solely responsible for creating the child in the form of the seed which the mother then receives and nurses. Thus, when Plato calls the receptacle not only "mother" but also "nurse" (τροφὸν καὶ τιθήνην *Ti.* 88d6, cp. 49a6 and 52d5), these terms are to be understood as synonyms. For it reflects the same passive conception of motherhood that Aeschylus attributes to Apollo in his defense of Orestes against the charge of matricide: "the mother of what is called her child is not its parent (τοκεύς), but only the nurse (τροφός) of the newly implanted germ. The begetter [viz. the father] is the parent, whereas she, as a stranger for a stranger, doth but preserve the sprout."[11] And while this is certainly the main instance of gendered ontology in the *Corpus Platonicum*, relevant parallels can be found in other dialogues, for example, in the *Symposium*'s account of the birth of Erôs, where the father is Poros ('plenty') and the mother is Penia ('poverty').[12] One could also point to Diotima's account of pregnancy in the *Symposium*, according to which the male actually gives birth to the child by emitting the seed, and the female's role appears to be limited to providing a beautiful receptacle.[13]

In what follows I shall be arguing that Plotinus distances himself significantly from the maternal-material thesis. The most significant passage for this argument is found in the final chapter of *Enn.* 3.6. This treatise is dedicated to the problems surrounding impassibility, with the first five chapters dealing with the impassibility of souls, and the final eleven chapters focused on the impassibility of matter. Only in the final chapter does Plotinus come to the analogy between matter and mother. Here, after restating some general points about the impassibility of matter, we get the following analysis of the appropriateness of the label 'mother,' which deserves being quoted in full:

> And so 'receptacle' (ὑποδοχὴ) and 'nurse' (τιθήνη) are more appropriate names for matter, but 'mother' is applied more loosely (οἷον), for matter does not generate (γεννᾷ) anything. But those people seem to call it 'mother' who think that a mother takes on the role of matter with

11 Aeschylus *Eu.* 658–661, Weir Smyth translation.

12 *Smp.* 203b. Moreover, in this account women are also characterized by a certain cunning. Poros's mother is named Metis ("cunning"), and Penia is described as "scheming" (ἐπιβουλεύουσα) to overcome her poverty (203b3–8). This negative characterization is made that much worse by being delivered by Diotima, though to be fair the father Poros is characterized as a drunken lay-about.

13 See *Smp.* 206b–e (esp. 206d7 ἴσχον τὸ κύημα), on which see Pender (1992, 72–86 at 73–76).

respect to her offspring, insofar as she only receives (ὑποδεχομένης) and contributes nothing to the formation of her offspring, since all that is body in the child is formed from the nourishment (τροφῆς). But if the mother does contribute something to her offspring, it is not in respect of matter but of form [to which she may] also [be likened] (ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ εἶδος), since only the form is productive while that matter is barren (ἄγονος).

Hence, I think, the wise men, too, of long ago, speak allegorically (αἰνιττόμενοι) in their mystic rites when they make the ancient Hermes with his reproductive organ always ready to work, making clear that what generates the sensibles is the intelligible *logos*, but revealing through the eunuchs (ἀγόνων) in attendance the barrenness (τὸ ἄγονον) of matter which always remains the same. For they have made it the mother of everything, a name which they apply to it precisely because they take it in the sense of substrate. And they give this name to make clear what they intend, since they want to indicate that it is not like a mother in every respect. To those who want to grasp more precisely in what way it is a mother and are not satisfied with a superficial enquiry, they indicated somewhat obscurely but still as best they could that matter is both barren and not even entirely female, but only female insofar as it receives, but as far as generating is concerned it is no longer female. They show this by making what comes close to it [viz. the eunuchs] neither female nor able to generate, but cut off from all power of generation, which is present only to what remains a male.[14]

This passage contains certain difficulties, but it is clear that Plotinus is distancing himself from the traditional associations made between the concepts of

14 Plotinus *Enn.* 3.6.19, 17–41, Gerson et al. translation, slightly revised. Ὥστε οἰκειότερον αὐτῇ ἡ ὑποδοχὴ καὶ τιθήνη· ἡ δὲ μήτηρ οἷον εἴρηται· οὐδὲν γὰρ αὖτη γεννᾷ. Ἀλλ' ἐοίκασι μητέρα αὐτὴν λέγειν ὅσοι καὶ τὴν μητέρα τάξιν ὕλης πρὸς τὰ γεννώμενα ἀξιοῦσιν ἔχειν, ὡς ὑποδεχομένης μόνον, οὐδὲν δὲ εἰς τὰ γεννώμενα διδούσης· ἐπεὶ καὶ ὅσον σῶμα τοῦ γινομένου ἐκ τῆς τροφῆς. Εἰ δὲ δίδωσιν ἡ μήτηρ τι τῷ γεννωμένῳ, οὐ καθ' ὅσον ὕλη, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ εἶδος· μόνον γὰρ τὸ εἶδος γόνιμον, ἡ δ' ἑτέρα φύσις ἄγονος. Ὅθεν, οἶμαι, καὶ οἱ πάλαι σοφοὶ μυστικῶς καὶ ἐν τελεταῖς αἰνιττόμενοι Ἑρμῆν μὲν ποιοῦσι τὸν ἀρχαῖον τὸ τῆς γενέσεως ὄργανον ἀεὶ ἔχοντα πρὸς ἐργασίαν τὸν γεννῶντα τὰ ἐν αἰσθήσει δηλοῦντες εἶναι τὸν νοητὸν λόγον, τὸ δὲ ἄγονον τῆς ὕλης μενούσης τὸ αὐτὸ ἀεὶ διὰ τῶν περὶ αὐτὴν ἀγόνων δηλοῦντες. Μητέρα γὰρ πάντων ποιήσαντες, ἣν δὴ οὕτως ἐπιφημίζουσι τὴν κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον ἀρχὴν λαβόντες καὶ ὄνομα τοῦτο θέμενοι, ἵνα δηλοῖεν ὃ βούλονται, τὸ πρὸς τὴν μητέρα οὐχ ὅμοιον πάντη ἐνδείκνυσθαι θέλοντες, τοῖς ὅστις ὁ τρόπος βουλομένοις ἀκριβέστερον λαβεῖν καὶ μὴ ἐπιπολῆς ζητοῦσι πόρρωθεν μέν, ὅμως δὲ ὡς ἐδύναντο, ἐνεδείξαντο ὡς ἄγονός τε καὶ οὐδὲ πάντη θῆλυς, ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτον μὲν θῆλυς, ὅσον ὑποδέξασθαι, ὅσον δὲ γεννᾶν οὐκέτι, τῷ τὸ πρὸς αὐτὴν κεχωρηκὸς πρὸς αὐτὴν μήτε θῆλυ εἶναι, μήτε γεννᾶν δύνασθαι, ἀποτετμημένον δὲ πάσης τῆς τοῦ γεννᾶν δυνάμεως, ἣ μόνῳ ὑπάρχει τῷ μένοντι ἄρρενι.

matter and mother. Note that Plotinus does not even attribute this view to Plato here—nor does he do so anywhere else in the *Enneads*—but only to an anonymous collection of natural philosophers who hold a particular view of the role of the female in biological reproduction, namely that the entirety of her contribution lies in receiving (and presumably nourishing) the male seed, which is itself sufficient to account for the generation of the offspring. As we saw above, Plato himself might well have held such a view, though Plotinus refrains from saying so, and there is certainly much in Aristotle that suggests such a view, even if the female contribution of form is ultimately part of his fully worked-out embryological theory.[15] Even if he leaves his initial response to this in the hypothetical mode ("But *if* …" [εἰ δὲ] *ll.* 23–25), it is clear that Plotinus rejects this account of generation. There is evidence enough of this within our passage,[16] but we would do well to turn to *Ennead* 5.7 in this connection, as this is without doubt his most embryologically-minded treatise. According to the account he provides here, human reproduction results from "mixtures" (μίξεις) of form-principles (*logoi*) contributed by both the father *and the mother*, with the offspring's resemblance to one or the other parent being determined by which contribution "prevails over" (κρατεῖ) the matter.[17] To be sure, Plotinus does not bother to work out a full-fledged embryological theory, but what he says in *Ennead* 5.7 makes clear that he is far from viewing the female as a mere receptacle for a male creative act. Rather, she is a partner in reproduction, contributing *logoi* just as the male does.[18]

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15 For a more in depth discussion of this issue, see, e.g., Connell (2016), Gelber (2018), and Henry (2007).

16 See esp. *Il.* 18–19 and 37–38.

17 See especially 5.7.2, 1–12. The account on offer in *Enn.* 5.7 with its talk of prevalence and mixture bears an unmistakable resemblance to the two-seed theories advanced by, e.g., the Hippocratics and Galen (see Wilberding (2016, 88n10)), but Plotinus never explicitly mentions a female seed, nor does he appear to view the menses as seminal (cp. 5.8.2, 6–7 and 2.9.12, 18–21). In this connection it bears repeating that in *Enn.* 5.7 Plotinus describes a mixture of *logoi* rather than a mixture of seeds. Unfortunately, Plotinus does not explain how the female contributes *logoi* without contributing a seed. One possibility, which must remain speculative, is that he anticipated the maternal actualization thesis, advanced by Neoplatonists from Porphyry onwards, which I have examined at length elsewhere, see Wilberding (2016, 58–99); and Wilberding (2015). One additional piece of evidence that might speak in favor of this speculation is found at 4.4.20, 28–33: τὴν δὲ φύσιν **ὡς μητέρα, ὥσπερ στοχαζομένην τῶν τοῦ πεπονθότος βουλημάτων, διορθοῦν τε πειρᾶσθαι καὶ ἐπανάγειν εἰς αὑτὴν** καὶ ζήτησιν τοῦ ἀκεσομένου ποιουμένην συνάψασθαι τῇ ζητήσει τῇ τοῦ πεπονθότος ἐπιθυμίᾳ καὶ τὴν περάτωσιν ἀπ' ἐκείνου πρὸς αὐτὴν ἥκειν.

18 There are two passages that might be in tension with the above. In *Enn.* 3.1.1, 32–35 Plotinus bluntly declares the father the cause of the offspring, while the mother is a mere συνεργόν, and in the very late treatise *Enn.* 2.3.14, 31–32 the pregnant mother is mentioned

Part of Plotinus' strategy to reject this close association between the material and the maternal involves an appeal to some unnamed "ancient sages" (οἱ πάλαι σοφοί) who also rejected this narrow association. Based on the description that follows, the sages in question appear not to be philosophers but certain members, perhaps the founding members, of the cult of the Great Mother Cybele, which was very prominent in Rome in Plotinus' life time.[19] It is not clear whether Plotinus is thinking of a single specific image or account, as opposed to collectively discussing several mythical elements associated with the cult, but the picture he paints for his readers consists of a personified company of three individuals or groups: the Great Mother Cybele herself together with two figures with whom she was often associated, Hermes and her following of Galli, the eunuch Corybant-priests in women's clothes who functioned as her servants.[20]

In his rather original allegorical interpretation of this picture Plotinus then seeks to clear away the infelicities of the association between matter and mother. This interpretation begins by correlating Hermes with the intelligible *logos* that generates (γεννῶντα *l.* 28) the sensible things.[21] Admittedly, this correlation runs the risk of misleading us into inferring that creative generation is the exclusive privilege of the male. That any such inference would be mistaken is made clear by the fact that in this very passage Plotinus wishes to emphasize that the female, too, generates (γεννᾷ *ll.* 18–19 and γεννᾶν *l.* 38). Rather, Hermes' masculinity is only accidentally involved in this correlation: a perpetually erect male member simply serves as a more easily discernible illustration of how the

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as a possible impediment to the generation of the offspring in certain cases. Neither of these remarks has in my opinion enough weight to overturn the views on offer in 3.6.19 and 5.7. *Enn.* 3.1 is a very early and extremely dialectical treatise, and in 2.3.14 Plotinus is still committed to the 'parents' (γονεῖς *l.* 6) being the cause of the offspring.

19 See Roller (1999, 287–326). There is a consensus among Plotinus scholars that Cybele is the figure behind the expression μητέρα πάντων in ll. 30–31. See, e.g., Kalligas (2014, ad loc), Laurent (2004, 240n270), Brisson (2004, 77–79).

20 On the association of Cybele and Hermes, see Sfameni Gasparro (1985, 73ff.), and Roller (1999, 176 and 200–202). On the Galli, I refer to Cumont's entry in the *RE*, which among much else contains this gripping report of the cult's rites in Syria, drawn from Lucian's *De dea Syria* 49–52: "Viele, die nur als Zuschauer gekommen waren, überlief die Raserei in der Weise, dass sie sich die Kleider vom Leibe rissen, unter lautem Geschrei in den Haufen der Begeisterten liefen, ein dazu bestimmtes Schwert ergriffen und sich selbst kastrierten. Dann rannten sie durch die Stadt, das abgeschnittene Glied in den Händen, und in welches Haus sie es warfen, aus dem bekamen sie einen weiblichen Anzug und Frauenschmuck" (679, 54–63).

21 For historical parallels to Plotinus' correlation between Hermes and *logos*, see Kalligas (2014, 575–576).

intelligible world stands eternally ready with the form-principles required for generation in the sensible world. But it is what Plotinus says about the remaining figures that really interests us here. For his contention is that these wise men did *not* intend the mother figure to serve as a symbol of matter, rather both the Great Mother Cybele and the Galli should be understood as standing *together* for matter. Each of them communicates one crucial feature belonging to matter: the mother figure captures matter's receptivity, and the eunuchs convey matter's inability to generate. The eunuchs are thus an indispensable element of the allegory. For, as Plotinus urges us to see, matter's inability to generate could never be effectively symbolized by a female—Plotinus switches freely between 'mother' (μήτηρ) and 'female' (θῆλυς) in this passage—since females *do* generate (γεννᾷ *ll.* 18–19 and γεννᾶν *l.* 38). Eunuchs are much better suited to convey this feature of matter, as they have literally had their power to generate clipped (ἀποτετμημένον) from them, a fact that can be readily depicted in a painting or a sculpture.

The overall view that emerges from this chapter, then, may be summarized as follows. He acknowledges that some people have maintained the maternal-material thesis, but he rejects it, because on his view mothers do more than merely receive; they also generate by supplying form-principles. And he then attempts to undermine the opposing view's claim to being more ancient and time-honored with an original allegorical interpretation of certain elements of the Cybele cult, which, if accepted, serves to lend his own view more historical weight.

There is only one other reference to the maternal-material thesis in the *Enneads*, and this is found in Plotinus' treatise on *erôs*, at 3.5.2, 17–24. Here Plotinus is setting out a distinction, drawn from Pausanias' speech in the *Symposium* (see esp. 180d4 ff.), between two Aphrodites, one 'heavenly' and one 'common' or 'vulgar'.[22] The former is described by Plato's Pausanias as being "the motherless daughter of Ouranos" (ἀμήτωρ Οὐρανοῦ θυγάτηρ, *Smp.* 180d7), whereas the latter is the daughter of Zeus and Diona. This prompts Plotinus to explain the appellation 'motherless', which he does in the following passage:

> We say that Aphrodite is in fact double; the one we call heavenly because she belongs to the heavens,[23] and the other is born of Zeus and Diona, who has to do with marriages in this world as their overseer. The former

22 As Wolters notes (1984, 57), this distinction was actually not uncommon in ancient literature.

23 Reading lower case *ouranou* at *ll.* 15–16 with HS4 (following Wolters, 1984, 58), for HS2's *Ouranou*.

> is 'motherless' and transcends marriages because there are no marriages in heaven. The heavenly Aphrodite, who is said to be the child of Kronos, who is Intellect, must be a most divine soul born pure directly from him who is pure and remaining above, since she does not come into this world nor does she want to nor is she able to; it is not in her nature to come down to this world because she is a separate real existent (χωριστὴν τινα ὑπόστασιν) and a substance and has no share in matter (ἀμέτοχον ὕλης οὐσίαν). This is the reason why *they* said allegorically (ᾐνίττοντο) that she is 'motherless.'[24]

Plotinus' somewhat cavalier attitude to Plato's text is on full display here, as he begins by revising heavenly Aphrodite's genealogy, making her the daughter of Kronos rather Ouranos, and removing the genealogical significance from the 'heavenly' appellation, which now is taken to mean that she belongs to the heavens, understood here in the sense of the intelligible world.[25] This revised genealogy allows Plotinus to cast heavenly Aphrodite as the hypostasis Soul, as he also elsewhere identifies Kronos as the hypostasis Intellect, which generates Soul.[26] Plotinus then gives two separate explanations of the appellation 'motherless.' The first is that there are no 'marriages' (γάμοι) in the intelligible world. Plotinus offers no further explanation of this striking claim, which I shall be returning to below. It is the second explanation that invokes the maternal-material thesis: the appellation 'motherless' of heavenly Aphrodite serves to communicate that the Soul is an hypostasis that does not partake in matter. But here again Plotinus is not himself advancing the maternal-material thesis, nor does he attribute it to Plato. He does no more than ascribe it to some nameless mythologists because *they* are the ones who insist on employing this kind of vocabulary in their myths.

To summarize the above, the maternal-material thesis is mentioned only twice in the entire *Enneads*, and in neither case does Plotinus advance it in his

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24 3.5.2, 14–25, Gerson et al. translation, slightly revised. Λέγομεν δὴ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην εἶναι διττήν, τὴν μὲν οὐρανίαν οὐρανοῦ λέγοντες εἶναι, τὴν δὲ ἐκ Διὸς καὶ Διώνης, τὴν τῶν τῇδε ἐφαπτομένην ἔφορον γάμων· ἀμήτορα δὲ ἐκείνην καὶ ἐπέκεινα γάμων, ὅτι μηδ' ἐν οὐρανῷ γάμοι. Τὴν δὲ οὐρανίαν λεγομένην ἐκ Κρόνου νοῦ ὄντος ἐκείνου ἀνάγκη ψυχὴν θειοτάτην εἶναι εὐθὺς ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἀκήρατον ἀκηράτου μείνασαν ἄνω, ὡς μηδὲ εἰς τὰ τῇδε ἐλθεῖν μήτε ἐθελήσασαν μήτε δυναμένην [ὅτι ἦν φύσεως], μὴ κατὰ τὰ κάτω φῦσαν βαίνειν χωριστὴν οὖσάν τινα ὑπόστασιν καὶ ἀμέτοχον ὕλης οὐσίαν—ὅθεν αὐτὴν τούτῳ ᾐνίττοντο, τῷ ἀμήτορα εἶναι.

25 See above note 23.

26 See 5.1.4.9; 5.1.7, 33; and 5.8, 12–13. Wolters (1984, 65) reports Schwyzer's assessment that there is "only one extant reference in Greek mythology to Aphrodite as the daughter of Kronos"—Epimenides 3B19 DK.

own name. In fact, in *Ennead* 2.4, which is the treatise that he specifically dedicates to examining matter, the term 'mother' *never* comes up. This is because the implications of the maternal-material thesis are incompatible with his own views on the active and creative contribution of the mother in biological generation.

3 Revision of the Traditional Myths

The third piece of evidence I would like to submit in support of Plotinus' more positive attitude towards women concerns his philosophical allegorizations of traditional myths. The fact is that, in comparison to his successors in the Platonic tradition, Plotinus has relatively little to say about the traditional myths.[27] Yet he does engage with the myths to some limited extent, and here I would like to focus on two examples of engagement that bear a special relevance to our examination.

The first case concerns the remark we just saw in the previous section. There, in the course of explaining the epithet 'motherless' applied to Aphrodite, Plotinus remarks, almost in passing, that there are no 'marriages' in the intelligible world (3.5.2, 18–19). It might be tempting to dismiss this as a provisional remark that Plotinus makes in passing and without genuine conviction,[28] but in fact this brief remark contains a pithy, explicit characterization of an implicit strategy that Plotinus consistently applies in his metaphysical allegorization of myths.[29]

This can be seen clearly by a brief comparison of Plotinus' interpretations of the traditional succession myths to the respective accounts in Hesiod. 'Marriage' (or sexual reproduction) is very prominent in Hesiod's account of nearly all of the gods' births. Kronos, for example, is said to be born of the intercourse between Gaia and Ouranos (*Theogony* 133), and Zeus is born of the intercourse between Rhea and Kronos (*Theogony* 453). In Plotinus' metaphysical recasting of this myth, however, all talk of marriage and intercourse has been excluded.

27 As the Henry-Schwyzer index nominum attests, he rarely mentions any gods by name, with the exception of Zeus.

28 As Wolter's (1984, 63) concludes: "he argues that the 'heavenly' Aphrodite is motherless, and hence beyond sex, because there is no sex in 'heaven.' Plotinus seems to realize that this tortuous reasoning is hardly convincing, since he replaces (or supplements) it almost immediately with a simpler explanation (viz. with the maternal-material thesis)." Cp. Kalligas *ad* 3.5.8, 17–23, where he suggests that Plotinus has implicitly reintroduced marriages into the intelligible world.

29 Cp. also Plotinus' claim at 4.4.44, 6–8 that the desire for marriage pulls the soul down.

Plotinus generally correlates the first Hesiodic deities (Ouranos, Kronos, Zeus) with his own three hypostases (One, Intellect, Soul),[30] and the following passage gives a fair representation of his general approach to these correlations:

> 'This is the lineage'[31] of the Intellect, worthy of the purest Intellect, born (ἐκ) from nowhere else than from the first principle (τῆς πρώτης ἀρχῆς) [i.e., the One], and, having been generated (γενόμενον), at once generating (γεννῆσαι) all Beings which are with itself, both all the beauty of the Ideas and all the intelligible gods. And it is full of the Beings it has generated (ἐγέννησε) and, in a way, swallows them again by having them in itself and neither letting them fall into matter nor be reared by Rhea—as the mysteries and myths about the gods enigmatically say that Kronos, the wisest god, before the birth of Zeus, holds back in himself what he generates (γεννᾷ), so that he is full and is like Intellect in satiety. After this, so they say, being already sated, he generates (γεννᾶν) Zeus, for Intellect, being perfect, generates (γεννᾷ) Soul. For since it is perfect, it had to generate (γεννᾶν) and since it was such a great power, it could not be barren (ἄγονον).[32]

On Plotinus' metaphysical retelling, Kronos is born simply "from the first principle". There is no mention of intercourse, nor even of Ouranos and Gaia. Plotinus, however, is at least prepared to refer to Kronos as the son of Ouranos on one occasion, namely at 3.5.2, 34 within the context of Plotinus' exegesis of the Aphrodite myth, just after the passage cited above, whereas Plotinus never refers to Gaia in the entire *Enneads*.[33] Plotinus' account of the birth of Zeus is

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30 Note Pépin's observation (1955, 25) that Plotinus is inconsistent in these correlations, correlating, for example, Zeus at times to *Nous* and even to the One. See also Lamberton (1989, 104–107).

31 See Plato *R.* 547a4–5 (who uses this expression of civil war), quoting Homer *Il.* 6, 211 (where it is uttered by Glaucus, son of Hippolochus).

32 Plotinus *Enn.* 5.1.7, 27–38, Gerson et al. translation. Ταύτης τοι γενεᾶς ὁ νοῦς οὗτος ἀξίας νοῦ τοῦ καθαρωτάτου μὴ ἄλλοθεν ἢ ἐκ τῆς πρώτης ἀρχῆς φῦναι, γενόμενον δὲ ἤδη τὰ ὄντα πάντα σὺν αὐτῷ γεννῆσαι, πᾶν μὲν τὸ τῶν ἰδεῶν κάλλος, πάντας δὲ θεοὺς νοητούς· πλήρη δὲ ὄντα ὧν ἐγέννησε καὶ ὥσπερ καταπιόντα πάλιν τῷ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχειν μηδὲ ἐκπεσεῖν εἰς ὕλην μηδὲ τραφῆναι παρὰ τῇ Ῥέᾳ, ὡς τὰ μυστήρια καὶ οἱ μῦθοι οἱ περὶ θεῶν αἰνίττονται Κρόνον μὲν θεὸν σοφώτατον πρὸ τοῦ Δία γενέσθαι ἃ γεννᾷ πάλιν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔχειν, ᾗ καὶ πλήρης καὶ νοῦς ἐν κόρῳ· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτά φασι Δία γεννᾶν κόρον ἤδη ὄντα· ψυχὴν γὰρ γεννᾷ νοῦς, νοῦς ὢν τέλειος. Καὶ γὰρ τέλειον ὄντα γεννᾶν ἔδει, καὶ μὴ δύναμιν οὖσαν τοσαύτην ἄγονον εἶναι.

33 The god Kronos is only mentioned by name in 5.1.4, 9; 5.1.7, 33; 3.5.2, 19 and 33. At 2.3.12, 22 Plotinus is discussing the star. But he refers to Kronos implicitly in his discussion of Zeus at 5.8.12–13.

even more telling. Hesiod's account has Rhea first having intercourse with Kronos and bearing their "splendid children" (*Theogony* 453), whereupon Kronos swallows all of the children except the youngest, Zeus, whom Rhea was able to save by switching him with a stone that Kronos gulped down instead (*Theogony* 466–491). By contrast, Plotinus again omits any reference to intercourse, and Rhea is no longer the mother and savior of Zeus, but something comparable to an unreliable *au pair* in whose care it is best not to leave one's child. Kronos is depicted as generating his own children—both his first children, the Forms, which he retains in himself, and his final child, the hypostasis Soul (Zeus)—all by himself.

This asexual, exclusively male recasting of Hesiod's succession myth stands in stark contrast to the exegetical practices of later Neoplatonists, who were very much willing to incorporate the language of sexual reproduction of the gods into their accounts of the intelligible world.[34] The contrast is that much more striking given that Plotinus does at times describe the generation of Intellect (and Soul) in terms that would in principle seem to lend themselves to a sexualized narrative. For the Intellect is sometimes described as resulting when the Dyad satisfies its desire for the One by receiving a procession from the One, which unfolds within the Dyad into the fully-fledged Intellect, and the One and the Dyad in this description could be correlated to the male (emitting seed endowed with form) and the female (receiving and developing said seed within herself), respectively.[35] So what are we to make of Plotinus' decision not to do so?

It would be wrong to take this as evidence that Plotinus sees generation falling exclusively to the male. For as we have just seen, Plotinus himself emphasizes elsewhere that generation belongs to the female, too, which is the main reason why he rejects the maternal-material thesis. The demotion of Rhea (Ῥέα) has nothing to do with her being female and everything to do with the connotations of her name, which Plotinus reasonably associates with flux (ῥεῖ) and thus the material world.[36] Nevertheless, if Plotinus is so committed

34 See, e.g., Proclus *Theol. Plat.* 1.28 (I 122, 3–26) and 4.10 (IV 33, 17–34,3) with discussion in Wilberding, (2016, 42 ff.), and now Schultz (2019).

35 For the desire of the Dyad, see *Enn.* 3.8.11, 23–24; 5.3.10, 48–11, 8; 5.6.5, 8–10; cf. 5.3.13, 17–19. For its reception of a procession from the One, see *Enn.* 3.8.11, 1–8; 3.9.5; 5.1.5, 18 and 6.42–8; 5.2.1, 19–20; 5.3.10–11; 5.4.2; 5.5.7. As Plotinus repeatedly maintains, the Dyad, while not being itself a multiplicity, is the cause of multiplicity in the Intellect: 'it is eternally receiving something else that is made many in itself' (*Enn.* 5.3.11, 3–4; and cf. *Enn.* 5.3.11, 7–8; 6.7.15, 20–22; and 3.8.8, 32–34).

36 This may be counted as a further instance of the maternal-material thesis, though here again it is not Plotinus but the mythologists who are endorsing the thesis. This is the only

to the thesis that females have a substantive role to play in generation, why does he pass over this female role in silence in his allegorical interpretations? Transferring the gendered language of sexual reproduction to the emanation of the hypostases would be misleading, firstly, because the dualistic framework of sexual reproduction—the male and the female being two, separate causal principles—is not well suited to explain the genesis of the hypostases, whose unity and non-dualistic nature Plotinus takes great pains to establish. Moreover, Plotinus cannot introduce this gendered framework without succumbing to the maternal-material thesis. For in the generation of the Intellect, the Dyad can only be described as a female or maternal principle if femaleness is reduced to receptivity, since this is the extent of the Dyad's role. Conversely, simultaneously likening the Dyad to the female and rejecting the maternal-material thesis results once again in the misleading suggestion that the Dyad *actively* contributes to the generation of Intellect.[37]

Consider, next, Hesiod's Pandora myth—certainly a candidate for one of the most notoriously misogynistic myths ever told,[38] and Hesiod tells it twice.[39] The gist of the myth—there is no reason to go into the details—is that womankind was created by order of Zeus in order to punish mankind for its unjust

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reference to Rhea in the *Enneads*. The main female discussed in the *Enneads* is Aphrodite (see especially 3.5 *passim*; 5.8.13, 16; 6.9.9, 29–32—discussed above and below; 4.3.14, 8 in connection with Pandora, discussed below; and 5.8.2, 10–11 in connection with beauty). Other potentially relevant references to females include: Adrasteia (3.2.13, 16–17, quoted and discussed above); Circe and Calypso (1.6.8, 18), notable for Plotinus' interpretation of these two female figures as standing for the pleasures of the sensible world and set in opposition to Odysseus' 'fatherland' (πατρὶς) and 'father' (πατὴρ), the intelligible world; Demeter and Hestia (4.4.27, 16 and 4.4.30, 19, understood as soul of the Earth); Dione (3.5.2, 16, mother of common Aphrodite); Helen (3.3.5, 42 and 5.8.2, 9—both in connection with beauty); and Hera 3.5.8, 22–23 (discussed below). Plotinus' references to Lachesis and Atropo (2.3.15), the Fates (2.3.9, 2–3 and 2.3.15, 10), and Necessity (2.3.9, 4), as well as his references to the Muses (3.7.11, 8–9 and 5.8.1, 10 and 42) and Grace (4.3.13, 9 and 5.8.1, 10), do not strike me as relevant to the present study. The same goes for his only reference to Athena (6.5.7, 12, in connection with Homer). Diotima is never mentioned, see below.

37 As I have suggested elsewhere (Wilberding, 2016, 38 ff.), a major reason why later Neoplatonists might have become more willing to use gendered language to discuss the metaphysics of the intelligible world lies in their commitment to the Orphic tradition and the Chaldean Oracles, where such language is already to be found.

38 The *Pauly-Wissowa* article calls Hesiod a 'pessimistischen Weiberfeind' (Art. 'Pandora' (3), 541, 44–45).

39 *Works and Days* 60–89 and *Theogony* 570–616. In the latter work Pandora is not mentioned by name. There is no need to go into the differences between these two accounts here. Allen (1985, 15) also points out that this same negative attitude toward women is communicated at *Works and Days* 376 and 755–757.

transgressions against the gods. Thus, Hesiod's view is not merely that women are "a thing of beauty and evil" (καλὸν κακὸν, *Theogony* 585), which would be problematic enough. Rather, his claim is that this is their entire *raison d'être*. On Plotinus' allegorization of this myth, however, it is not about womankind at all:

> Given that all this has actually occurred, this ordered cosmos, which shines already with many lights and is illuminated by many souls, receives further forms of order in addition to the previous ones, deriving one from another, both from the gods there and from the other intellects which produce souls. Such, it seems, is the enigmatic meaning of the myth, which tells how, when Prometheus had fashioned the woman (τὴν γυναῖκα), the other gods (οἱ ἄλλοι θεοί), too, adorned her. It says he 'mixed earth with water' and put a human voice in her, and made her like the goddesses (θεαῖς) in appearance, and Aphrodite gave her something, and so did the Graces, and other gods gave her other gifts (ἄλλον ἄλλο δῶρον), and they named her from the gift and from all the givers; for all (πάντες) gave their share to this product fashioned by a certain providence. But what could the instruction to Epimetheus to reject the gift mean other than that the choice of what is in the intelligible world is better [...] Now one may interpret this story any way one wants; the important thing is that it is the circumstances of the gift to the cosmos that is the clear subject of the story, and that is in harmony with my account.[40]

As other scholars have already commented on many of the details of this passage, especially on Plotinus' "cavalier disregard for accuracy" evident in this exegesis,[41] we may simply highlight several of the main points relevant to our

40 4.3.14, 1–13 and 17–19, Gerson et al. translation. Τούτων δὴ γινομένων φῶτα πολλὰ ὁ κόσμος οὗτος ἔχων καὶ καταυγαζόμενος ψυχαῖς ἐπικοσμεῖται ἐπὶ τοῖς προτέροις ἄλλους κόσμους ἄλλον παρ' ἄλλου κομιζόμενος, παρά τε θεῶν ἐκείνων παρά τε νῶν τῶν ἄλλων ψυχὰς διδόντων· οἷον εἰκὸς καὶ τὸν μῦθον αἰνίττεσθαι, ὡς πλάσαντος τοῦ Προμηθέως τὴν γυναῖκα ἐπεκόσμησαν αὐτὴν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι θεοί· γαῖαν ὕδει φύρειν, καὶ ἀνθρώπου ἐνθεῖναι φωνήν, θεαῖς δ' ὁμοίαν τὸ εἶδος, καὶ Ἀφροδίτην τι δοῦναι καὶ Χάριτας καὶ ἄλλον ἄλλο δῶρον καὶ ὀνομάσαι ἐκ τοῦ δώρου καὶ πάντων τῶν δεδωκότων· πάντες γὰρ τούτῳ ἔδοσαν τῷ πλάσματι παρὰ προμηθείας τινὸς γενομένῳ. Ὁ δὲ Ἐπιμηθεὺς ἀποποιούμενος τὸ δῶρον αὐτοῦ τί ἂν σημαίνοι ἢ τὴν τοῦ ἐν νοητῷ μᾶλλον αἵρεσιν ἀμείνω εἶναι; [...] Ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὅπῃ τις δοξάζει, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐμφαίνει τὰ τῆς εἰς τὸν κόσμον δόσεως, καὶ προσᾴδει τοῖς λεγομένοις.

41 See Dillon and Blumenthal (2015). Other scholarly discussions of this passage include Pépin (1958, 200–201), Lamberton (1989, 103–104), Brisson (2004, 231n303), and Marzillo (2010).

examination. First and foremost, as with the *Timaeus*' transmigration doctrine, Plotinus here once again refuses to accept that the female life is in any way a form of punishment. This he achieves, firstly, by not taking Pandora to refer to the first woman or to womankind, rather Pandora here stands symbolically for the entire sensible world. This interpretative move might not have struck Plotinus' contemporaries as abstruse as it strikes many of his readers today, given that 'Pandora' was also a common ancient epithet of the Earth (or the goddess of the Earth).[42] And secondly he eliminates any suggestion that his Pandora is created as a punishment. Thus, he omits in particular the treacherous "lies and guileful words and [the] thievish character" with which Athena equips Pandora in Hesiod's version,[43] so that there is no longer any reason to think that Pandora's gifts are disagreeable; they are all blessings. To say that Pandora possesses gifts from all the gods amounts to saying that the sensible world contains form-principles corresponding to all of the Forms in the intelligible world. Plotinus' Pandora, the sensible world, is to be rejected, not because she is inherently wicked or foul—this would come close to the Gnostic doctrine that Plotinus is so concerned to refute in *Ennead* 2.9—but simply because there is something better, namely its model, the intelligible world itself.

4 Caveats and Conclusion

The thesis of this chapter has been that Plotinus' *Enneads* lack the kind of ambivalence toward women that infects Plato's dialogues. In the above three sections I have sought to provide support for this thesis by demonstrating that Plotinus avoids a number of misogynistic theses that belong to the tradition he inherits. He rejects the two most problematic theses about women in the dialogues, namely the regrettable reincarnation thesis and the maternal-material thesis. And his engagement with the mythological tradition also appears to be characterized by a concern to avoid certain problematic conceptions of the

42 See the two separate entries in the *RE*: "Pandora (1)" at 529, 24–531, 3, concerning the "Epiklese der Mutter Erde als Allgeberin," and "Pandora (3)" at 531,18–547,23, concerning the mortal woman. Philo, for example, also refers to the Earth as Pandora (*Opif*. § 133 and Aet. § 38), though he does not combine this with Hesiod's myth, as Plotinus does. Later Neoplatonists took even greater liberties and offered slightly different allegories of Hesiod's Pandora. For Porphyry she stood for bodily pleasures, and for Proclus for the irrational life. See Marzillo (2010, xxxv—xli).

43 *Theogony* 78, Most translation.

female, as is illustrated most clearly in the case of his Pandora exegesis but also seems to be true of his metaphysical allegorizations of the traditional succession myths.

In this final section I would like to shift our attention to the less progressive side of Plotinus' thought. The lack of ambivalence about the nature of women in the *Enneads* is not due only to Plotinus' rejection of certain misogynistic theses; he also fails to seize on some of the most celebrated progressive points in Plato's thought. For example, although Plotinus devotes an entire treatise (*Ennead* 3.5) to an exegetical analysis of the topic of love as treated by Plato in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, he never once even mentions the name Diotima, the female sage who arguably has the greatest claim to wisdom of any character in the dialogues, let alone underline and discuss the significance of her being a female. Perhaps even more disappointing is the fact that Plotinus never refers to or discusses the celebrated philosopher-queens thesis of the *Republic*, nor any of the correlated theses regarding the equality in education and career.

In addition to these omissions, there are some indications that Plotinus' attention is at times still skewed towards the male. Certain passages in his writings appear to be directed (primarily) at a male readership. His claim at 3.5.1, 57–58, for example, that the "love of women" (ἔρωτα γυναικῶν), by which he *means* heterosexual love, is for the sake of the perpetuation of the human race, only makes sense from the male perspective. And the same would seem to go for his remarks about the temptations associated with "the beauty of boys and women" at 2.9.17, 28, as well as his consideration of whether the "memories of one's friends, children *or wife* are retained in the afterlife" (4.3.32, 1–2). Moreover, he is still to some extent in the grips of the traditional picture of the female as subordinated to the male, as is illustrated at one point in 3.5.8. Here he is considering how the *Symposium*'s remarks about Zeus' relationship to Aphrodite are best unpacked in his metaphysical interpretation, one major problem being that both Zeus and Aphrodite have a serious claim to being identified with Soul. He attempts to solve this problem by identifying Zeus as the Intellect corresponding to Soul, and he supports this attempt with two separate lines of exegetical reasoning. The first need not concern us here, but the second is this: "For if we rank the male gods at the level of Intellect and say that the female gods are at the level of their souls, since a soul accompanies (συνούσης) each intellect, in this way, too, Aphrodite would be the soul of Zeus."[44] Certainly, when measured against our current sensibilities, the fact that Plotinus leaves

44 *Enn.* 3.5.8, 17–20: Καὶ γὰρ εἰ κατὰ μὲν τὸν νοῦν τοὺς ἄρρενας τάττομεν τῶν θεῶν, κατὰ δὲ τὰς

this line of argumentation in the hypothetical mode ('for *if* …') does little to diminish the damage done by the suggested subordination of the female to the male in this passage. Nevertheless, this remark about subordination is one that Plotinus never repeats or invokes anywhere else in the *Enneads*,[45] and as we seek to assess Plotinus' general views on women and the female, we should be careful not to grant too much weight to this one remark.

I submit that the above represents the worst of Plotinus' offenses against the fair and equal treatment of women in the *Enneads*. While these problems should by no means be ignored, the evidence on balance paints a picture of Plotinus as someone who was aware of some of the misogynistic pitfalls he inherited from his predecessors and who actively sought to avoid them himself.

My aim here has been to investigate Plotinus' attitude towards women and the female solely on the basis of his own writings, but no study on this topic would be complete without calling attention to the evidence Porphyry supplies in his *Life of Plotinus*. As there is already a significant amount of scholarship on this material, I limit myself here to a sketch of some of the most salient points about his school and living situation that generally speaking, support the egalitarian picture of Plotinus painted above. We learn, for example, that his school included three women who were "very devoted to philosophy" (σφόδρα φιλοσοφίᾳ προσκειμένας): Gemina and her daughter, also called Gemina, and Amphicleia (*Plot*. 9, 1–5), though we know little more about them than their names.[46] It is in Gemina's house that Plotinus' school was located, and this is also where he lived. Indeed, the house appears to have been home to other women as well. We are told, for example, that a certain Chione—about whom

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ψυχὰς αὐτῶν τὰς θηλείας λέγομεν, ὡς νῷ ἑκάστῳ ψυχῆς συνούσης, εἴη ἂν καὶ ταύτῃ ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ Διὸς ἡ Ἀφροδίτη […], Gerson et al. translation.

45 Kalligas (2014, *ad* 3.5.8, 17–23) calls this 'a general exegetical principle for the allegorical interpretations of myths,' but, as Flamand rightly points out, 'cette repartition […] soit sans autre example chez Plotin' (474n159). Moreover, here again, as with Plotinus' engagement with the maternal-material thesis, there is no pressing reason to attribute the subordination thesis to Plotinus himself. His suggestion here is simply that *the ancient mythologists* viewed women as subordinate to men and that this must be taken into account in the exegesis of these myths.

46 The exact meaning of this great devotion remains unclear. Emilsson (2017, 15) maintains that none of these women may be counted as 'professional' philosophers, a label that applies only to Porphyry, Amelius and Eustochius among Plotinus' students. To this I would add that the fact that Gemina owns a house suggests that she has not entirely committed herself to philosophy (see *Plot*. 8, 31–35 and 9, 12–16). Regarding the very little we know about the identities of these three women, see Goulet-Cazé (1992, 231–327) and the respective entries in the *DPhA*.

we again know effectively nothing—also lived in the house with her children (*Plot.* 11, 3–4). What is more, Porphyry tells us that the house "was full of boys and girls" (ἐπεπλήρωτο αὐτῷ ἡ οἰκία παίδων καὶ παρθένων, *Plot.* 9, 9–10), brought to him by men and women looking to make appropriate arrangements for their children before their own impending deaths, though it is impossible to judge the extent to which Plotinus was actively involved in the lives of these children.[47] In short, Plotinus appears to have spent his life in Rome in a kind of commune for widows and orphan boys and girls. Finally, we are informed that the emperor Gallienus and his wife Salonia were friends with Plotinus whom they held in great respect, and that he sought their support to found a new city whose "inhabitants would live according to Plato's laws" (νόμοις δὲ χρῆσθαι τοὺς κατοικεῖν μέλλοντας τοῖς Πλάτωνος, *Plot.* 12, 6–7). This brief report invites a certain degree of speculation as to which of Plato's laws Plotinus had in mind—e.g., is this a specific reference to Plato's *Laws*, or may this be understood as a reference to the laws outlined in the *Republic*?—and more specifically regarding what we may infer about Plotinus' commitment to Plato's specific legislation concerning women, about which, as we saw above, he remains silent in the *Enneads*.

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47 We are told only that he safeguarded their finances for them until such time as they might decide to take up philosophy, which would suggest that the philosophical path was available to them all (9.12–16), and that at least in the case of one child, Potamo, Plotinus was actively involved in his education (9.10–12).

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CHAPTER 3

Marcella and Porphyry

Luc Brisson

The purpose of this paper is to understand the Neoplatonists' judgment of women's ability to become virtuous and to live a philosophical life, taking the *Letter to Marcella* by Porphyry as the main text of reference. I will begin by setting the scene, providing a reading with commentary of the first four sections of the letter; then I will try to understand the philosophical argumentation leading to this change in the status of women, going back to Plato through Numenius.

1 The Letter

It may be assumed that, like Plato's *Seventh Letter*, the *Letter to Marcella* was an open letter.[1] Even if it begins as a letter of consolation for his wife, whom Porphyry had just left after ten months of life in common, it is above all an exhortation to the philosophical life, addressed, by her master, to a woman who was part of the circle of philosophers.

> **1.** I [Porphyry] chose to take you, Marcella, as my wedded wife, you who are mother of five daughters, and two sons,[2] some of them still young children, some now waiting to attain puberty,[3] without being unduly concerned about the number of necessities that would be required for their needs. I chose to wed[4] you not in order[5] to produce bodily offspring, for I

1 See Whittaker (2001, 150–168), (2010, 43–54), Guillaumont (2017, 301–315).

2 In his *Life of Porphyry* (17, p. 10.20–11.3), Eunapius (end of the 4th century CE), attributes five children to Marcella, even though he knew of the existence of this treatise. The same holds true of the *Theosophy of Tübingen* (5th century CE) which, perhaps as a result of Christian calumnies, gives credence to the accusations mentioned at the beginning: Porphyry rejected Christianity, and, out of greed, married a rich widow, "mother of five children, already elderly and Jewish".

3 In Antiquity, the age of puberty is around fourteen, see Darrel W. Amundsen and Carol Jean Diers (1969, 125–132). Girls had the legal right to marry from the age of 12, and boys from the age of 17.

4 Etymologically, the term σύνοικον means "to live together, in the same house", or "to marry". But it is impossible to say whether it was a sham marriage or not.

5 List of negative reasons: 1) not for sex; 2) not for wealth; 3) not for care; 4) not for fame.

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had decided to have as children those who are lovers of the true wisdom, along with your own children,[6] should they someday embrace the correct philosophy, as they are brought up under our guidance. Nor, of course, did I choose to wed you because of an abundance of money which either you and your children or I possessed, for even the basic necessities content those who are poor. I chose to wed you not on the expectation of receiving some comfort for myself from the service of another as I decline into old age,[7] for you are in bad health and are more likely to require medical attention[8] from others than to assist or take charge of them. Nor did I choose to wed you for any other practical purpose or in the pursuit of a good reputation and words of praise from insignificant people. I wanted to bear such a burden voluntarily, out of the simple desire to do good. For, far from being praised, because of the foolishness of your fellow citizens[9] and in their jealousy of us, I have encountered many slanderous remarks, and, contrary to every expectation, I ran the risk of death at their hands because of you and your children.[10] **2.** It was for none of these motives, therefore, that I have made you a partner of our life, but rather for two laudable reasons.[11] The first was that I decided to appease the guardian deities presiding over generation,[12] following the precedent of the imprisoned Socrates who chose to compose music in the common sense of the term in preference to his customary philosophic activity for the sake of his safe departure from life.[13] For in the same way also I myself, in attempt to appease the divinities in charge of comi-tragedy,[14] did not hesitate to contend for the prize in the marriage hymn, cheerfully taking on your large family, the attendant hardship over the necessities, and the wickedness of those who insulted me. For none of the themes which usually combine in a drama is missing—not jealousy, not hatred, not derisive laughter,

6 We find a similar context in the *Life of Plotinus* (9, 9–16) as we shall see below. See also Diotima, in *Symposium* 208e–209e.

7 Around 290–300 CE, Porphyry, who was born in 234, was between 60 and 70 years old.

8 Marcella, who could have been between 40 and 50 years old, was not in good health.

9 Rome, or a Sicilian city?

10 Because of taxes (see below p. 67) or religion (see below p. 67)?

11 Positive reasons: 1) acknowledgement of the necessities of human nature; 2) exhortation to philosophy.

12 The expression is found in *Laws* V 729c7; IX 879d2. The reference is probably to Zeus and Hera, tutelary divinities of marriage in ancient Greece. See, in the *Life of Plotinus* (15, 1–6), the anecdote on mystical marriage.

13 An allusion to the anecdote told at the beginning of the *Phaedo*, 60e–61a.

14 A very rare word: κωμῳδοτραγῳδία. See also in the *Γνῶθι σαυτόν* (F 275, 39 Smith).

not angry altercations—except of course that it was not for ourselves but for others that we rendered service to the divinities and played out this drama.[15] **3.** The second reason was more divinely inspired and not at all like this common one: in my admiration of your natural aptitude for the right philosophy,[16] I did not think it fitting, after you were bereft of your husband, who was a friend of mine,[17] to leave you abandoned without a partner and protector wise and suited to your character. After I drove away all those trying to lure you into illusion, I endured their unreasonable outrages and I bore their acts of treachery with composure. In freeing you, as it fell to my lot to do, from every master, I brought you back to your proper[18] lifestyle, sharing philosophy and pointing out a doctrine consistent with that way of life. And indeed, who else could be a more reliable witness for me than you? I should dishonor you shamefully, if I treated you in a perfunctory manner or concealed my concerns, but not if I remind you truthfully beginning to end—since you esteem truth above all and therefore consider our wedding a godsend—of everything done in and on account of it. **4.** So, when circumstances permitted me a longer stay on the spot, you could draw on my resources like a deep fresh drink from flowing streams so large a draft as satisfied your immediate need, then you could also feel confident about obtaining renewed refreshment through my resources after a respite. But when the needs of the Greeks summoned me and the gods joined in their request,[19] it was impossible for you, however eager you were, to obey the call as well, because of your many dependent daughters. Yet, to toss them out without you among scoundrels like these, I considered an act of insensitivity and injustice. But since I am

15 A comparison often used in a philosophical context, even by Plotinus. Man is merely an actor, but he can be either a good or a bad actor, see Plotinus (*Enn.* 3.2 [47]).

16 On the possibility for women to become true philosophers.

17 This husband was, as we shall learn, 1) a friend, 2) wealthy, 3) a philosopher. Marcella herself might have been the daughter of Marcellus, a senator who attended Plotinus' classes between 263 and 268 CE: "A good many members of the Senate also attended his lectures, of whom Marcellus, Orrontius and Sabinillus worked hardest at philosophy" (*Life of Plotinus* 7, 29–31, transl. A.H. Armstrong). Others have also thought of Probus, to whom Porphyry went in Sicily on the advice of Plotinus: "I obeyed him and went to Sicily, since I had heard that a distinguished man called Probus was living near Lilybaeum" (*Life of Plotinus* 11, 16–17). But these are mere conjectures.

18 I read ἑαυτῆς for Wicker's ἐμαυτοῦ at 275,4 Nauck.

19 This sentence has given rise to several interpretations. Some have seen in it a reference to a kind of deliberative council preceding the edict of 303 CE that triggered the persecution of Diocletian, as suggested by H. Chadwick (1959, 142–143), though this is disputed, see Whittaker (2001, 155).

> compelled to remain here,[20] holding on to the hope of our reunion, the best I can do is to urge you to adhere to the precepts imparted in the ten months you have been wed to me and not to throw away, out of a yearning and a desire for more, what you already have as well. For I am eager, in whatever way I can, to resume your instruction again as soon as possible.
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> *Ad. Marc.* §§ 1, 1–4, 13, transl. by KATHLEEN O'BRIEN WICKER, revised as in other citations

Porphyry first recounts his marriage to Marcella. This account is hard to interpret, for it is difficult to situate it in space and time. Porphyry is on the brink of old age, and Marcella, who has seven children, is in poor health. Above all, we know neither where the wedding was celebrated nor where Porphyry sent his letter from.

This text is filled with social and political references. First of all, Porphyry gives a list of negative reasons why he wed Marcella. It was not to have children; it was not to get money; it was not for personal care; and it was not to get a good reputation. Then he gives two positive reasons. The first one is rhetorical: acknowledgement of the necessities of human nature may be referring to the social convention according to which a man should marry and have children; Porphyry didn't have children of his own but adopted many. The second one, exhortation to philosophy, is the real motive, as we will see.

But why was Porphyry slandered and even threatened? It seems that Marcella's husband and the father of her children was a member of the class of the court dignitaries of his city, or that he was a senator. Dignitaries were obliged to personally take on liturgies, that is, to pay the expenses incurred by two kinds of activities: all kinds of spectacles, heating of the public baths, transport of grain to feed the people, etc. In a sense, these were taxes, which could be onerous. But Porphyry, as a teacher, was exempt from these,[21] and so was Marcella's family after the wedding; one can therefore understand the indignation and anger of the other dignitaries, who had to pay more for liturgies.

But another motive could be taken into account: Porphyry's opposition to the Christians. This obscure passage may mean that Porphyry opposed the pressure that was exerted on Marcella by Christian suitors:

> After I drove away all those trying to lure you into illusion, I endured their unreasonable outrages and I bore their acts of treachery with composure.

20 He has already left, but where is he? See notes 19 and 23.

21 Petit (1955, 327–328, 343).

> In freeing you, as it fell to my lot to do, from every master, I brought you back to your proper lifestyle, sharing philosophy and pointing out a doctrine consistent with that way of life.
>
> *Marc.* § 3, 5–10

And this other sentence—"But when the needs of the Greeks summoned me and the gods joined in their request"—has given rise to several interpretations. Some have seen in it a reference to a kind of deliberative council preceding the edict of 303 that triggered the persecution of Diocletian.[22] One might, however, also think simply of Athens, where Porphyry might be contributing his assistance to the Platonists who opposed the influence of Iamblichus.[23]

1.1 *Consolation*

After just ten months of common life, Porphyry had to stay abroad, and Marcella, who had to take care of her daughters, could not join him. That is why this letter is labeled a 'consolation' letter. But it is much more than that.

In taking care of a widow and orphans, Porphyry was imitating Plotinus who considered himself as a disciple of Pythagoras, through the intermediary of Plato. In his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry wrote:

> There were women, too, who were greatly devoted to philosophy: Gemina,[24] in whose house he lived, and her daughter Gemina, who had the same name as her mother, and Amphiclea, who became the wife of Ariston, son of Iamblichus. Many men and women of the highest rank, on the approach of death, brought him their children, both boys and girls, and entrusted them to him along with all their property, considering that he would be a holy and god-like guardian. So his house was full of young lads and maidens, including Potamon, to whose education he gave serious thought, and would even listen to him revising the same lesson again and again. He patiently attended to the accounts of their property when their trustees submitted them, and took care that they should be accurate: he used to say that as long as they did not take to philosophy their properties and incomes must be kept safe and untouched for them.
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> *Life of Plotinus* 9, 1–16, transl. by A.H. ARMSTRONG

22 See note 419.

23 This is the hypothesis suggested by Alt (1996, 208–210), based on *Life of Plotinus* 17, where τῶν δ' ἀπὸ τῆς Ἑλλάδος refers to the Platonists at Athens. See also Saffrey (2008, 3–26).

24 May be the widow of the late emperor Trebonianus.

However, one can go further and recognize a deeper attitude, which places men and women on an equal level as far as philosophy is concerned. I will underline only one element that is relevant for the topic at hand: the fact that as far as philosophy is concerned, women are placed by the Platonists on the same level as men: "do not be concerned about whether your body is male or female." (*Marc*. § 33, 12–13, trans. O'Brien Wicker).

This position implies a radical critique of the traditional definition of the human being. This is a doctrinal point that goes back to Plato, and was taken up again by Plato's followers, Numenius, Plotinus and Porphyry, who, at the beginning of our era, turned him into a follower of Pythagoras.

1.2 *Protreptic*

As was underlined by Walter Pötscher,[25] after a few words of consolation, the *Letter to Marcella* falls under the protreptic genre. Porphyry wants to be Marcella's director of conscience, instructing her to keep on the side of philosophy against Christian influence and using many Pythagorean maxims.[26] Marcella must not let herself be discouraged by the absence of her husband, but, with the help of her master, Porphyry, live alone according to a philosophical life described in the second part of the letter.

This philosophical life concerns not the body but the soul, a soul that has been purified from passions and is guided by reason; for it is in the soul that the true self resides (§§ 5–10).

Traditional religion and the ethical behavior it induces are the cornerstone of this philosophical life. To acknowledge the existence of the divinity, to honor it by appropriate acts, to conform in one's daily life to the demands of that perfect entity, seeking to unite with it: this is what must be done (§§ 11–24).

Indeed, the natural law has its roots in traditional religion (§§ 11–24), which, however, must itself lead to situating the divinity within the intellect (§§ 25–34). This exhortation takes up what one finds in the *De abstinentia* and in the *Sentences*. The *Letter* ends suddenly with § 35, probably as a result of a material accident.

The *Letter* has an anti-Christian tone which reminds us of chapter 16 against the Gnostics in the *Life of Plotinus*, as if Porphyry wished to warn Marcella that he wants to remain a Platonic philosopher, against a possible Christian influence. In section 24, Porphyry cites a maxim that scholars have been quick to

25 Pötscher (1969).

26 Rocca-Serra (1971, 193–202).

attribute to Pythagoras: "No god is responsible for evils committed by a man; rather man himself causes them by the choices he makes for himself" (§ 24, 1–2, trans. O'Brien Wicker). Situating himself in the context of the thought of Plotinus, Porphyry explains that genuine belief in God, true faith which is a mixture of traditional belief and philosophical doctrine, consists in acknowledging the guiding role of the Intellect in all things, and especially within us, where it is represented by good demons,[27] who watch over those who share this firm belief. Consequently, those people who know they are being watched refrain from committing faults, and their exemplary life will enable them to maintain genuine intercourse with the gods. Porphyry opposes this true faith to the irrational faith (πίστις ἄλογος) of the Christians. Yet what does πίστις ἄλογος mean? We find this expression in Porphyry's *Against the Christians*, quoted by Eusebius, *Evangelical Preparation*, I 1, 11; I 2, 4 and I 3, 1. Here is one of these passages:

> For some (Porphyry for instance) have supposed that Christianity is not rational at all (οὐδένα λόγον), but that those who desire the name confirm their opinion (δόξαν) by an unreasoning faith (ἀλόγῳ δὲ πίστει) and an assent without examination (ἀνεξετάστῳ συγκαταθέσει); and they assert that no one is able by clear demonstration to furnish evidence of the truth of the things promised, but that they require their converts to adhere to faith (πίστει) only, and therefore they are called 'the Faithful,' because of their uncritical and untested faith (πίστεως).
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> *Evangelical Preparation* I 1, 11, transl. by E.H. GIFFORD revised

This irrational belief and faith is opposed to genuine faith, which is based on the practice of virtue and wisdom. This kind of remark orients us directly toward Plotinus, for whom assimilation to God presupposes the practice of the civic, purificatory, and contemplative virtues. These virtues are supposed to lead to identification with the Intellect, which is the genuine god, and from there to the union of the Intellect[28] with the One. Christianity, by contrast, is opposed to philosophy in that it promotes an irrational faith (πίστις ἄλογος), having nothing to do with the Intellect, the highest level in the philosophy of Plotinus, after the One beyond being.

27 See Timotin (2012), Brisson (2018, 86–101).

28 See Porphyry, *Sentence* 32 on the degrees of virtue.

2 Women and Philosophy

The genuine originality of the *Letter to Marcella* consists not in the content of the doctrine it sets forth, but in the fact that it is addressed to a woman who should live a philosophical life based on the tradition. On this point, Porphyry can appeal first of all to Plato.

2.1 *Plato*

The status of women in a traditional society depends essentially on the definition of human beings. If human beings are defined by their body, a clear distinction imposes itself between women, whose role is to produce and raise children, and men, who must work to feed their wives and children, and who must fight to protect them.

In Plato, the definition of human being changes. Human beings are living beings, that is, the temporary conjunction of a soul and a body. The body, which is made up of the four elements (fire, air, water, and earth), and is dissolved after a certain number of years, is merely a temporary element. Human beings are defined by their soul, for the soul is responsible for all the cognitive and physical movements of human beings, and, above all, it survives them, and can thus be punished or rewarded in another world.

On this earth, the soul, although it basically remains one, is the source of activities grouped around three functions: a cognitive function, which accounts for the knowledge that may or may not involve the body; an aggressive function, enabling the defense of the body; and a desiring function, which ensures the nutrition and reproduction of the body. It is the excellence of the activities implemented by these functions that allows individual humans to be divided into the three functional groups that make up society: the producers, whose psychic excellence implies the control of desire; the guardians, whose psychic excellence resides in courage, and the philosophers, whose souls are turned toward knowledge. There is thus a direct relation between the three functions of the soul and the three groups contained in the city; it is the soul's excellence that defines the place and role of human beings in the city, and no longer their body, endowed with male or female gender.

Since there are women among the functional group of the guardians, it follows that among the group of philosophers who will lead the city, we will necessarily find women, as Socrates clearly says at the end of book VII of the *Republic* (540c). This was an absolute revolution for the time. The most important point, however, lies elsewhere. The leader or leaders are chosen among the guardians as a function of the ability of their soul to devote itself to higher studies. It therefore follows that women will have access to the course of stud-

ies described in book VI of the *Republic* and, by understanding mathematics and dialectic, may become philosopher-leaders. In addition, access to philosophy presupposes that women and girls will have previously been educated in a manner equal to that of men and boys.

In the *Laws*, the legislation concerning education is conspicuous. As the Athenian Visitor proclaims loud and clear: "We are not going to withdraw our recommendation that so far as possible, in education and everything else, the female sex should be on the same footing as the male" (*Laws* VII, 805c–d, transl. by Trevor J. Saunders). The entire program of public studies of the city of the *Laws* is therefore open to both boys and girls, to men and to women, as we can observe by reading the long passage VII–VIII 788a–842a. Here, the mixed nature of compulsory teaching is forcefully affirmed (VII, 806c–904d).[29]

Moreover, throughout the subsequent historical tradition of Platonism, we find the names of women who attended the Academy, which was a kind of institute for advanced studies in philosophy and politics:[30]

> His disciples were Speusippus of Athens, Xenocrates of Chalcedon, Aristotle of Stagira, Philippus of Opus, Hestiaeus of Perinthus, Dion of Syracuse, Amyclus of Heraclea, Erastus and Coriscus of Scepsus, Timolaus of Cyzicus, Euaon of Lampsacus, Python and Heraclides of Aenus, Hippothales and Callipus of Athens, Demetrius of Amphipolis, Heraclides of Pontus, and many others, among them two women, Lastheniea of Mantinea and Lasthenia of Phlius,[31] who is reported by Dicaearchus to have worn men's clothes.
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> DIOGENES LAERTIUS III 46, transl. by R.D. HICKS

Although we cannot verify the validity of these names cited by Diogenes Laertius, whose sponsor was a rich woman fond of Plato, we must admit that we find ourselves here in a context in which women can become philosophers, which was very original for the time.

Because he considers human beings to be defined by their soul, and not by their body, Plato, who is not a feminist in the modern sense of the term,[32] is led, quite logically, to place women on the same level as men, from every viewpoint. This position, which was shocking or laughable in Antiquity, has become the

29 Cohen (1987, 27–40). Women must therefore participate fully and equally in life and in the government of the city, on pain of depriving them of half of their potential.

30 Dion attended the Academy.

31 Dorandi (1989, 51–56).

32 Vlastos (1995, 133–143).

rule in our societies. On the other hand, our societies cannot accept sharing women and children, which reduces sexual union to its reproductive function, and therefore has nothing to do with pleasure or desire.

2.2 *Plato Pythagoreanized*

For Plato, there was no distinction between men and women on the political and philosophical level. The whole question turns now to whether he was the first to hold this position, or whether he was preceded by the Pythagoreans.

If one reads the catalogue of Pythagoreans included in Iamblichus' *On the Pythagorean Life*, which may go back to Aristoxenus, we find this list of women.

> The most famous Pythagorean women are: Timycha, wife of Myllias of Croton; Philtys, daughter of Theophris of Croton, sister of Byndacus; Occelo and Eccelo, sisters of the Lucanians Occelus and Occilus; Cheilonis, daughter of Cheilon the Lacedaimonian; Cratesicleia, the Laconian, wife of Cleanos, the Lacedaemonian; Theano, wife of the Metapontian Brotinus; Myia, wife of Milon of Croton; Lasthenia, from Arcadia; Habroteleia, daughter of Habroteles of Tarentum; Echecrateia of Philius; Tyrsenia from Sybaris; Peisirrhode from Tarentum; Theadusa from Lacedaemon; Boeo from Argos; Babelyca from Argos; Cleaechma, sister of the Lacedaemonian Autocharidas. Total 17.
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> IAMBLICHUS 36.267, 66–77, transl. by GILLIAN CLARK

Most of these women are unknown, and even those we have some information about remain enigmatic. This list seems to be a fiction.[33]

In his *Life of Pythagoras* (§ 4), Porphyry names Theano as Pythagoras' wife, who wrote letters to women. Pythagoras himself is supposed to have made speeches to the women of Croton, and had several women among his disciples (§ 19). In addition, in his *Letter to Marcella*, Porphyry, beginning with section 9, quotes several maxims, 45 of which, by des Places' count, can be attributed to Pythagoras. But which Pythagoras? The historical Pythagoras, of whom we know nothing, or a Pythagoras re-invented by Platonists in search of renewal?

Porphyry and Plotinus were part of an ideological movement that sought to anchor Platonism within Pythagoreanism, by fashioning forgeries that took up the main Platonic doctrinal points to re-situate them within a Pythagorean

33 Pomeroy (2013).

context, by using the Doric dialect, utilizing orality, and insisting on secrecy.[34] Here is what can be inferred from the testimony of Numenius.

2.2.1 Numenius

As we can read in the first book of his work *On the distance of the members of the Academy from Plato*, Numenius reproaches the Old Academy for not having been able to preserve Plato's doctrine in all its purity, as the disciples of Pythagoras did for their master, though Plato was neither inferior nor superior to him (frag. 24, 14–22 des Places).[35] Numenius goes even further by establishing a link between Plato and Pythagoras through the intermediary of Socrates, who is considered a disciple of Pythagoras.

Indeed, according to Numenius, it is a difference of opinion on an essential doctrinal point that he attributes to Socrates but that quite obviously belongs to the Pythagorean tradition, which explains the dissension among his disciples:

> But long before them, the same thing happened with those followers of Socrates who took different lines—Aristippus his own, Antisthenes his own, the Megarians and Eretreans variously their own, and whoever else there might have been with them. The reason is that Socrates posited three gods, and discussed them in rhythms appropriate to each. Those who heard him did not understand and thought that he was saying it all without order, directed by the winds of chance as they blew here and there at random. But Plato had Pythagorean training and knew that Socrates derived it all from no other source than that, and that he understood what he said. So he too bound his subjects together in an unconventional manner and did not set them out clearly.
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> frag. 24, 47–58 DES PLACES, transl. G. BOYS-STONES

The interest of this passage consists not in its historical validity, but in its ideological orientation. The doctrine of the three gods attributed to Socrates is in fact formulated by a Pythagorean forgery, the *Second Letter* that Plato was supposed to have addressed to Dionysius the Younger:

> Upon the king of all do all things turn; he is the end of all things and the cause of all good. Things of the second order turn upon the second, and those of the third order upon the third. Now the soul of man longs to

34 Huffmann (2005, 5).
35 O'Meara (1989).

> understand what sort of things these are, and it looks toward the things that are akin to itself, though none of them is adequate; clearly the king and the other principles mentioned are not of that sort. The soul thereupon asks: What then is that nature of these? This is the question, O son of Dionysos and Doris, that causes all the trouble; or rather, this it is that produces in the soul the pains of childbirth, from which she must be delivered, or the soul will never really attain truth.
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> *Letter* II 312e–313a, transl. GLENN R. MORROW revised

Several features denounce this letter as a neo-Pythagorean forgery. 1) The doctrine set forth in it is described as ἀκούσματα, a term designating a writing that functions as a reminder, enabling the recollection of the essential points of secret oral doctrines. 2) It is formulated in the manner of an enigma (αἴνιγμα), a language with double meanings that was used by the Pythagoreans. 3) For the Pythagoreans, the number three is primarily associated with the κόσμος, according to Aristotle (*De caelo* I 1, 268a10–13). 4) The author of this letter recommends that it be destroyed after it has been read, an instruction that refers to the Pythagorean secrecy.

This doctrine of the three gods in Numenius will be taken up in another context by Plotinus with his three "hypostases"—the One, Intellect and Soul; this is why he was accused of having plagiarized Numenius (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 18, 1–18). In short, in the second century CE, the agreement between Platonism and Pythagoreanism had become a "common opinion," and constituted the basis of Pythagorean forgeries that tried to highlight the dependency of Plato's thought on that of Pythagoras and the convergence of these two trends of thought.

Pythagorean influence, which, on mathematical grounds, was already noticeable in the Old Academy with Speusippus and Xenocrates seems to have experienced a comeback with the critique of the New Academy namely by someone like Numenius. Indeed, what is called "Neopythagoreanism" can be understood as a "Pythagoreanization" of Platonism. To show that Plato was a disciple of Pythagoras, texts were fashioned from scratch that were written in "Doric", a Greek dialect of Southern Italy and Sicily, where the Pythagoreans were concentrated. They situated the great Platonic themes—in ethics, politics, epistemology, cosmology, and metaphysics—within a context that was considered "Pythagorean".

2.2.2 Pythagorean Women: Inauthentic Letters

In this kind of literature, which has been collected and edited by Holger Thesleff, one finds many letters attributed to Pythagorean women and addressed to other women:

– from Melissa to Cleareta on *Women's duties*;[36]
– from Myia (a daughter of Pythagoras?) to Phyllis on the *Education of children*;[37]
– from Perictione (the same name as that of Plato's mother) on the *Good behavior of women*[38] and on *Wisdom*;[39]
– from Phintys on the *Moderation* (σωφροσύνη) *of women*;[40]
– from Theano (the wife or disciple of Pythagoras)
  to Eubule on the *Education of children*, and *Against luxury*;[41]
  to Nicostrate on the *Art of overcoming jealousy*;[42]
  to Callisto on the *Art of ruling over servants*;[43]
  to Eurydice on the *Art of putting up with jealousy*;[44]

No justification of equality between men and women is to be found in this feminine pseudo-Pythagorean literature. Moreover, all these inauthentic letters reflect a certain old-fashioned male perspective indicating that they were probably produced by men: thus, they emphasize obedience to one's father, husband, and city; modesty; care of children; domestic economy, etc. One finds in these letters themes taken up from common opinion and ascribed to Pythagorean women. What is more, these are the same themes one finds in the speech given by Pythagoras to the women of Croton.[45]

We must therefore return to Plato. Only in Plato can we find the principle that enables women to be established on an equal level with men as far as education in general and philosophy in particular were concerned. By no longer reducing a woman's identity to her body that confines her to the private sphere, that is, to her condition as a wife and mother, new horizons were opened up for her.

In conclusion, Porphyry, who married Marcella probably in order to free her family from liturgical duties (that is, from taxes), sent her a letter of consolation from overseas, where he was at the time, in order to exhort her to accept this separation and to live a philosophical life. Inspired by Plato, who defines human beings not by their body but by their soul, and taking advantage of the

36 See Thesleff (1965, 115–116).
37 See Thesleff (1965, 123–124).
38 See Thesleff (1965, 142–145).
39 See Thesleff (1965, 146). Wisdom makes it possible to perceive principles of all and gods.
40 See Thesleff (1965, 151–154).
41 See Thesleff (1965, 195–196).
42 See Thesleff (1965, 198–200).
43 See Thesleff (1965, 197–198).
44 See Thesleff (1965, 197).
45 Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 18–19; Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 54–58.

common opinion which, among the Platonists of the time, made Plato a disciple of Pythagoras, he considers Marcella a true philosopher, just like those women who were present in the entourage of Plotinus. This is why he urges her not to yield to the irrational faith of the Christians, but to seek to identify herself with the divinity represented by the Intellect.

Women's access to higher education and to philosophy is, for the first time, justified by Plato in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, where human beings are no longer defined by their body but by their soul. This doctrinal point was taken up and extended to late Pythagoreanism by Platonists, including Numenius, who, reacting against the New Academy, made Socrates, and therefore Plato, disciples of Pythagoras. Plotinus and Porphyry were immersed in the context of this Pythagoreanized Platonism.

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CHAPTER 4

On the Equality in Virtue of Women and Men in Late Antique Platonism: Proclus, Julian and Philip the Philosopher

Dominic O'Meara

In memory of Werner Beierwaltes

∴

The thesis presented in Plato's *Republic* that women can have capacities for virtue equal to those of men is not only very significant in putting women, some women at least, on an equal footing with some men with respect to moral potentiality, but also far-reaching, since it leads to the revolutionary conclusion that if good political rule is a function of intellectual and moral competence, given the right education, women can also qualify as potential rulers of an ideal state: this state will be governed not only by philosopher-kings but also by philosopher-queens (455d–457c).

Plato's ideas on this subject were neither ignored nor forgotten by Platonist philosophers in Late Antiquity. We meet them in the fifth century, in Proclus' *Commentary* on Plato's *Republic*, and already a century earlier, in Julian the Emperor's speech in honour of the Empress Eusebia, and again, a century after Proclus (as I will claim), in the fragment of a commentary on Heliodorus' novel *Aethiopica* attributed to a certain "Philip the philosopher."

The authoritative and very influential head of the Athenian school, Proclus, not only provides his own interpretation of Plato's ideas about equal moral capacity in women and men, but also preserves arguments (otherwise lost) developed by a Platonist predecessor, Theodore of Asine (first half of the 4th century A.D.), in support of Plato's philosopher-queens. I have briefly considered the views of Theodore of Asine and of Proclus in the context of an attempt to sketch an outline of Late Antique Platonic political philosophy and they have also been studied by others.[1] While agreeing with much of what has been

1 See O'Meara (2003, 83–86), Longo (2007), Baltzly (2013), Pass (2017), Dillon (in this volume).

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shown in these studies, I would like here (I) to add some further analysis of Proclus' text, in particular as regards the metaphysical background to his position on women. Then (II) I will come back to Julian's speech in praise of the Empress Eusebia, a text which has rarely been discussed in the present context, but which deserves, I will argue, to be added to the dossier concerning Platonist views on moral equality in women and men. Finally (III), I will examine the fragment of a commentary on Heliodorus attributed to Philip the philosopher, which, as I hope to show, also belongs to this dossier and which has more to offer than that which has been noticed so far.

1

Proclus devotes two essays (Essays VIII and IX) of his collection of essays commenting on Plato's *Republic* to Plato's ideas about the moral equality of men and women and the education which would provide women, as well as men, with the competence for good political rule. Essay IX presents Theodore of Asine's arguments in support of Plato in these matters, whereas Essay VIII provides a more extensive account of Proclus' own position.[2] In the following I will concentrate on Essay VIII and on Proclus' views.

At the outset we might note that, as an exegete of Plato committed to Platonism, Proclus is confronted both with differing positions to be found in different texts in Plato (in particular, the equality of women in the *Republic* and the inferiority of women in the *Timaeus*,[3] and their absence from supreme rule in the *Laws*) and with the impression one can get that, even within the *Republic*, Plato's position on women is not simple. This impression can be given, for example, by the following passage (a text to which we will need to return later):

> What you say is true, he [Glaucon] said, namely that one sex is much superior to the other in almost everything, yet many women are better than many men in many things, but in general it is as you say.
>
> [Socrates] There is therefore no pursuit connected with governing the state which belongs to woman because she is a woman, or to a man because he is a man, but various natures are scattered in the same way among both kinds of persons. Woman by nature shares all pursuits, and so does man, but in all of them woman is a weaker creature than man.[4]

2 On the question of the relation between these two essays, see Baltzly (2013, 405).

3 See below at n. 14.

4 Plato, *Republic* 455d2–e2 (transl. Grube, slightly modified): Ἀληθῆ, ἔφη, λέγεις, ὅτι πολὺ κρα-

In attempting to explain Plato's statements on women in the *Republic*, Proclus will therefore need to find a position which is both consistent within the *Republic* and with Plato's other dialogues. I will not attempt here to describe Proclus' account as a whole, but would like to draw attention to the following points.

Women's education in virtue, an education qualifying them for political rule, has to do in particular, according to Proclus, with 'political virtue.'[5] 'Political virtue' is an expression which Plotinus had used to describe in general the four cardinal virtues that Plato had defined in *Republic* Book IV: these virtues, in Plotinus' view, concern the ordering of affects arising in soul's life with the body and represent the first stage in a moral ascent to higher virtues, a higher level of assimilation of the human soul to the divine.[6] Proclus inherited from his Platonist predecessors, in particular from Iamblichus, an elaboration of this hierarchy of virtues as a scale for the divinisation of human life.[7] He defines 'political virtue' in the preceding essay (Essay VII) as "a disposition which perfects the relational life of the parts of the soul,"[8] the parts being those of the tripartite soul of Plato's *Republic*: reason, spirit and desire.

A consequence of identifying the virtue in question as that which concerns a perfect disposition in the relations between the parts of the soul (vice being a harmful disposition of these relations) is that this virtue has to do with states of the *soul*[9] and is not a function of bodily differences:

> Therefore in this way there are women who are worthy of the education and virtue of men, since they have risen, in some way, above the lack of power of the female, as there are men who have fallen down to females' lack of power. And one should consider not the sex, but the power or lack of power of each of the sexes and define education in relation to this. And

τεῖται ἐν ἅπασιν ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν τὸ γένος τοῦ γένους. γυναῖκες μέντοι πολλαὶ πολλῶν ἀνδρῶν βελτίους εἰς πολλά· τὸ δὲ ὅλον ἔχει ὡς σὺ λέγεις. Οὐδὲν ἄρα ἐστίν, ὦ φίλε, ἐπιτήδευμα τῶν πόλιν διοικούντων γυναικὸς διότι γυνή, οὐδ' ἀνδρὸς διότι ἀνήρ, ἀλλ' ὁμοίως διεσπαρμέναι αἱ φύσεις ἐν ἀμφοῖν τοῖν ζῴοιν, καὶ πάντων μὲν μετέχει γυνὴ ἐπιτηδευμάτων κατὰ φύσιν, πάντων δὲ ἀνήρ, ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ ἀσθενέστερον γυνὴ ἀνδρός.

5 Proclus, *in R.* I 236, 5–6; I cite by volume, page and line number Kroll's edition.

6 See O'Meara (2019, 65 and 78–81).

7 The late antique Platonic scale of virtues (which included a range of degrees going up from the natural, ethical, and political to the purificatory, contemplative, theurgic virtues) has been described in a number of works; I may be permitted to refer to my survey in O'Meara (2019, 20–21).

8 I 208, 29–30; for a study of 'political virtue' in Essay VII see MacIsaac (2009).

9 See already I 221, 9–222, 4.

> if the same souls become the souls of men or of women, exchanging types of lives, and if virtues belong to souls, not to bodies, how can one contrive to distinguish their perfections as different on the basis of bodies, and not as the same on the basis of souls? But this is sufficient evidence that virtues are shared in common, given that the souls of both sexes, even more so, are common to each.[10]

In fact, men and women, as souls, share the same nature and so can have the same virtues (and vices).[11] This is so because they, as souls, belong to the same species, humanity:

> And this [Socrates] added in a wonderful way, in support of human beings sharing the essence of the same species. For Aristotle too says [see *Cat.* 5, 3b33–4a9] that the 'more and less' is to be found in those of the same species, in what are white, black, hot, cold. But what does not share at all in the same species is not said to share in it 'more or less', but this is said rather of that which is the same, with intensity or lack of it. Thus even if some share more, others less, in the perfection that is appropriate to humanity, yet both males and females have the [same] nature in common, and both sexes share all the same pursuits.[12]

But what then is this "more and less" in the same species, the more and less which differentiate the male and female in souls of the same species? Is it

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10 I 249, 10–21: οὕτως οὖν καὶ γυναῖκές εἰσιν τῆς ἀνδρῶν ἄξιαι παιδείας καὶ ἀρετῆς, ἐξαναστᾶσαί τινα τρόπον ἀπὸ τῆς θηλυπρεποῦς ἀδυναμίας, καὶ ἄνδρες εἰς τὴν ἐκείνων ἀδυναμίαν ἐκπεσόντες. καὶ δεῖ μὴ τὸ γένος βλέπειν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἑκατέρου τοῖν γενοῖν δύναμιν ἢ ἀδυναμίαν καὶ ταύτῃ τὴν παιδείαν ὁρίζειν. εἰ δὲ καὶ αἱ αὐταὶ ψυχαὶ γίγνονται καὶ ἀνδρῶν καὶ γυναικῶν ἀλλάττουσαι τοὺς βίους, αἱ δὲ ἀρεταὶ ψυχῶν εἰσιν οὐ σωμάτων, τίς μηχανὴ διὰ τὰ σώματα ποιεῖν αὐτῶν τὰς τελειότητας διαφερούσας, ἀλλὰ μὴ διὰ τὰς ψυχὰς τὰς αὐτάς; ὡς αὐτό γε τοῦτο τεκμήριον ἱκανὸν τοῦ κοινὰς εἶναι τὰς ἀρετάς, τὸ κοινὰς εἶναι πολλῷ πρότερον ἀμφοτέρων τὰς ψυχάς. Proclus' use of the word ἀδυναμία reminds one of Aristotle's terminology for the female (see, for example, *De generatione animalium* 728a17–20).

11 See also Olympiodorus, *In Alcibiadem* 188, 13–14; 189, 3–10; 194, 18–195, 5 (ed. Westerink). Olympiodorus probably reflects Proclus' position in his lost commentary on the *Alcibiades*.

12 I 241, 14–23: καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο προσέθηκεν δαιμονίως εἰς πίστιν τῆς ὁμοειδοῦς οὐσίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων· τὸ γὰρ μᾶλλον καὶ ἧττον ἐν τοῖς ὁμοειδέσιν καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης εἶναί φησιν, ἐν λευκοῖς ἐν μέλασιν ἐν θερμοῖς ἐν ψυχροῖς. τὸ δὲ μηδ' ὅλως ταὐτοῦ μέτοχον εἴδους οὐ λέγεται μᾶλλον ἢ ἧττον μετέχειν, ἀλλ' ὃ ἂν ᾖ ταὐτὸν μετ' ἐπιτάσεως ἢ ἀνέσεως. εἰ δ' οὖν καὶ οἱ μὲν μᾶλλον, οἱ δὲ ἧττον τῆς ἀνθρώπῳ προσηκούσης τελειότητος μετέχουσιν, ἀλλ' ἡ φύσις κοινὴ καὶ τῶν ἀρρένων ἐστὶ καὶ τῶν θηλειῶν, καὶ κοινὰ πάντα ἀμφοτέροις τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα.

something acquired as a result of social conditions, upbringing, education? Or is there some natural "more and less" differentiating male and female souls belonging to the same species?

Proclus seems to think that there is indeed some difference in nature distinguishing male and female souls, a difference in what he describes as a "natural receptive capacity":

> For natural receptive capacity is imperfect, but education leads nature to perfection. And even if, to speak in general, the female is weaker with regard to these things [i.e. the pursuits mentioned in the preceding passage] than the male, we will not divide them. For one should consider not the organs, but forms of life.[13]

The theme of female 'weakness' takes up, it appears, an idea we find in the passage quoted above from Plato's *Republic*. For Proclus, female souls are weaker than male souls in terms of a natural receptive capacity for virtue.

> The inferiority of the receptive capacity in women in relation to all pursuits persuaded both Plato and Timaeus to lead the soul, in a second life [*Timaeus* 42b], down to the nature of a woman. For the descent is not on account of power but on account of lack of power, for greater lack of power makes for greater weakness.[14]

To find out more about this, we need to turn to Proclus' *Commentary* on Plato's *Timaeus*. Here we discover that souls, taken in themselves, according to Proclus, have sexes. He gives as an argument for this the need for souls to be seen as intermediates between the sexual differentiation of gods/goddesses and that of animals. The sexual difference in souls does not necessarily correspond to the sexual difference in bodies: 'male' souls can descend into female bodies and 'female' souls can occupy male bodies.[15] What makes a soul 'female' or 'male'

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13 I 241, 26–30: ἡ γὰρ φυσικὴ ἐπιτηδειότης ἀτελής, ἡ δὲ παιδεία πρὸς τὸ τέλειον ἄγει τὴν φύσιν. κἂν ἀσθενέστερον ᾖ τὸ θῆλυ πρὸς ταῦτα μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ ἄρρεν, ὡς ὅλον εἰπεῖν, οὐ διοισόμεθα· δεῖ γὰρ οὐκ εἰς τὰ ὄργανα βλέπειν, ἀλλ' εἰς τὰ εἴδη τῆς ζωῆς.

14 I 248, 27–249, 2: ἡ δὲ ὕφεσις τῆς ἐν ταῖς γυναιξὶν ἐπιτηδειότητος πρὸς πᾶσαν ἐπιτήδευσιν ἀνέπεισεν καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ τὸν Τίμαιον ἐν δευτέροις βίοις ἄγειν εἰς γυναικὸς φύσιν τὴν ψυχήν. οὐ γὰρ διὰ δύναμιν ἡ κάθοδος, ἀλλὰ διὰ ἀδυναμίαν· ἡ γὰρ μᾶλλον ἀδυναμία ποιεῖ τὸ μᾶλλον ἀσθενές.

15 *in Ti.* III 283, 12–284, 12 (ed. Diehl), a passage noted by Pass (2017, 430); see *in R.* I 249, 10–19 (quoted above at n. 10). On sexed souls (and their 'vehicles') see Baltzly (2013, 412–413). The metaphysical argument leading to the idea that souls have sexes can already be found in Syrianus, *in Metaph.* 97, 24–27 (ed. Kroll).

is therefore not what makes a body female or male. Souls are male or female depending, it seems, on how they are constituted by the world-maker (the Demiurge): both are made from a mix of the same components, Being, Sameness and Difference. But in some souls Sameness is more prevalent (male souls) and in others it is Difference (female souls).[16] Although Sameness and Difference, as metaphysical components expressing Limit and the Unlimited and as constituting souls, are complementary and are both needed for the production of souls, they are not equal: Sameness is metaphysically prior and superior to Difference, which is secondary and subsidiary. In consequence, if belonging to the same species, male and female souls are not equal: male souls, i.e., souls in which Sameness is prevalent, are superior to female souls, where Difference is more prominent. Proclus appropriates the concept of 'male' to refer to primary metaphysical principles and the concept of the 'female' to refer to subsidiary principles.

This differentiation between male and female souls can explain, I believe, the difference in 'natural receptive capacity' in souls which we have found above in Proclus' exegesis of the *Republic*. This difference does not always coincide with sexual difference in humans as souls in bodies. So some women, Proclus tells us

> are worthy of the education and virtue of men, since they have risen, in some way, above the lack of power of the female, as there are men who have fallen down to females' lack of power.[17]

One would like to know more about this "in some way", which remains unexplained. But perhaps enough has been seen to conclude that there are, in Proclus' view, differences in souls, identified as 'male' and 'female,' corresponding to differences in their metaphysical constitution which mean differences in their receptive capacity for virtue. These differences often correspond, Proclus probably assumes, to the differentiation between men and women in corporeal existence, but not always and not necessarily: some women can have male souls (and so a greater capacity for virtue) and some men can have female souls. At any rate, the distinction between male and female describes a relation of priority which has metaphysical roots in the priority of the principle of Sameness with respect to the principle of Difference. The difference in receptive

16 This theory is examined by Schultz (2019), to whom I refer the reader for further discussion.

17 Text quoted above at n. 10.

capacity for virtue may evoke Plato's view that people have different natural abilities.[18] But in Proclus this difference relates to differences in the composition of the natures of souls, male and female souls representing a "more and less" with respect to their capacity for virtue. The difference between male and female souls is grounded in turn on a system of priority of metaphysical principles, of divinities forming what has been described as a "cosmic patriarchy."[19]

2

A century earlier, an enthusiastic student of Iamblichean philosophy, recently made Caesar by his cousin, the emperor Constantius II (November 355), and before his revolt against Constantius and becoming himself emperor (November 361), composed two speeches of praise for Constantius and one for Constantius' wife Eusebia. Julian's speeches in praise of Constantius sound forced and are unconvincing: one can almost feel the constant danger in which Julian lives of being eliminated at any moment by the emperor. In contrast, the speech for Eusebia (composed in 356/357) sounds more personal and sincere: in Eusebia Julian found a protector and beneficent ally in his difficult dealings with her husband. The praise of Eusebia follows to some extent the traditional scheme prescribed for such rhetorical pieces. The person to be praised is extolled in terms of family background, virtues and actions expressing these virtues. I will note here some of what Julian has to say about Eusebia's virtues and virtuous actions.

Julian, in speaking of her virtues, ascribes to Eusebia not only the traditional female virtue of moderation (σωφροσύνη),[20] but also the other cardinal virtues, and yet others besides:

> Now I should think it strange indeed if we shall be eager to applaud men of high character, and not think fit to give our tribute of praise to a noble woman, believing as we do that virtue is the attribute of women no less than of men. Or shall we who think that such a one ought to be moderate and wise and competent to assign to everyone his due, and brave in danger, high-minded and generous, and that in a word all such qualities

18 *R.* 415b–c and elsewhere; Proclus refers to this at I, 249, 2–10.

19 Baltzly (2013, 420).

20 She is described as a statue of moderation (123a), here in the sense probably of conjugal fidelity. I cite Julian in the edition published by Bidez et al., vol. I, 1.

> as these should be hers,—shall we, I say, then rob her of the encomium due to her good deeds, from fear of the charge of appearing to flatter?[21]

If we compare this list of virtues with lists of the virtues which Julian ascribes to Eusebia's husband in the same speech,[22] we notice that the virtues are the same: there is no difference, it appears, between the virtues of Eusebia and those of Constantius. Indeed, Eusebia seems to be superior to her husband in this regard:

> And do you think this a trifling tribute to Penelope, or is there not now found to be yet another woman whose virtue surpasses hers, and who, as the consort of a brave, magnanimous and moderate Emperor, has won as great affection from her husband, since she has mingled with the tenderness that is inspired by love that other which good and noble souls derive from their own virtue, whence it flows like a sacred fount? For there are two jars, so to speak, of these two kinds of human affection, and Eusebia drew in equal measure from both, and so has come to be the partner of her husband's counsels, and though the Emperor is by nature merciful, good and wise, she encourages him to follow yet more becomingly his natural bent, and ever turns justice to mercy.[23]

I will come back to Penelope later. Here one might notice Julian's suggestion that Constantius has *natural* virtue, i.e. a virtue with which he is born. Shared with animals and children, natural virtue is the lowest level of virtue in the Iamblichean and post-Iamblichean scale of virtue,[24] lower even than 'ethical

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21 *Ad Eusebiam* 104b (transl. Wright, slightly modified): Ἐμοὶ δὲ θαυμαστὸν εἶναι δοκεῖ, εἰ τοὺς ἄνδρας μὲν τοὺς καλοὺς προθύμως ἐπαινεσόμεθα, γυναῖκα δὲ ἀγαθὴν τῆς εὐφημίας οὐκ ἀξιώσομεν, ἀρετῆς οὐδὲν μεῖον αὐταῖς ἤπερ τοῖς ἀνδράσι προσήκειν ὑπολαμβάνοντες. Καὶ γὰρ εἶναι σώφρονα καὶ συνετὴν καὶ νέμειν ἑκάστῳ τὰ πρὸς τὴν ἀξίαν καὶ θαρραλέαν ἐν τοῖς δεινοῖς καὶ μεγαλόφρονα καὶ ἐλευθέριον, καὶ πάντα ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ὑπάρχειν ἐκείνῃ οἰόμενοι χρῆναι τὰ τοιαῦτα, τῶν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἔργοις ἐγκωμίων ἀφαιρησόμεθα, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ κολακεύειν δοκεῖν ψόγον δεδοικότες; For Eusebia's virtues see also 106a, 112b.

22 109a, 129d.

23 *Ad Eusebiam* 8, 114b–c: Ἆρα τοῦτο ὑμῖν τῆς Πηνελόπης ὀλίγον ἐγκώμιον δοκεῖ, ἢ εἰ δή τις ἄλλη τὴν ἐκείνης ἀρετὴν ὑπερβαλλομένη γαμετή τε οὖσα βασιλέως ἀνδρείου καὶ μεγαλοψύχου καὶ σώφρονος τοσαύτην εὔνοιαν ἐνεποίησεν αὑτῆς τῷ γήμαντι, συγκερασαμένη τῇ παρὰ τῶν ἐρώτων ἐπιπνεομένῃ φιλίᾳ τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἀρετῆς καθάπερ ῥεῦμα θεῖον ἐπιφερομένην ταῖς ἀγαθαῖς καὶ γενναίαις ψυχαῖς; Δύο γὰρ δὴ τώδε τινὲ πειθώ τε καὶ ἰδέα φιλίας ἔστον, ὧν ἥδε κατ' ἴσον ἀρυσαμένη, βουλευμάτων τε αὐτῷ γέγονε κοινωνὸς καὶ πρᾳ̂ον ὄντα φύσει τὸν βασιλέα καὶ χρηστὸν καὶ εὐγνώμονα πρὸς ἃ πέφυκε παρακαλεῖ μᾶλλον πρεπόντως καὶ πρὸς συγγνώμην τὴν δίκην τρέπει.

24 See above n. 7.

virtue', a type of virtue which is acquired by training and is itself lower than 'political virtue', where rationality, the virtue of prudence, is required. Constantius would seem to require training, like animals and small children, so as to acquire 'ethical' and then (perhaps) 'political virtue'. Eusebia is his teacher in virtue, educating him so that he may reach virtues worthy of a rational human being.

In the passage I have just quoted, we also notice that Eusebia shares in her husband's rule; she shares in his counsels and acts as a co-ruler.[25] She persuaded Constantius to permit Julian to study philosophy in Athens; in Julian she honoured philosophy (129bc). Julian's time in Athens was, it appears, a dream come true. But then the emperor called on Julian to be Caesar and assume the function of general in Gaul. Like the philosopher in Plato's *Republic* who has to return to the cave, Julian was reluctant to abandon his studies and engage in such activities, but Eusebia persuaded him to take up these offices of power (121c, 123b).

Eusebia's actions were beneficial. The good she did is compared by Julian with the achievements of a series of semi-mythical queen-rulers: Semiramis, Nitocris, Rhodogune, Tomyris. The exploits of these queens were much admired, but Julian notes the vainglory (φιλοτιμία, 128b) that motivated them and catastrophes that followed their achievements. Julian then refers to a woman particularly admired by Homer, Penelope, a model of domestic femininity. Yet Eusebia surpasses Penelope, as we have read in the passage quoted above. Julian brings out Eusebia's superiority by comparing her to Pericles. He repeats the story that Pericles, as a politician, had boasted that he had not been responsible for someone's death (128d). But Julian says that it is better not only not to have caused evil, but also to have done good: this is, Julian tells us, the main point (κεφάλειον) of his praise of Eusebia (129b). Superior to Penelope in her political action, Eusebia is even superior to mythical queens and to Pericles in the good that she did.

In conclusion, we can say that Julian paints the portrait of what would be for a Platonist an ideal philosopher-queen.[26] She is equal and indeed superior to her husband emperor in virtue; she defends the cause of philosophy; she shares in the exercise of power and in her actions she promotes the good. She saved a young student of philosophy who would himself become emperor, but whose modest view of his own capacities would lead him to see himself, not as a philosopher-king, but as an executive power in the service of philosophy.[27]

25 See also 117a.

26 See Vatsend (2000, 100–108).

27 See O'Meara (2018).

3

The last example I would like to consider in this paper is provided by the fragmentary opening of a dialogue which offers an exegesis of Heliodorus' novel *Aethiopica* and is preserved in a manuscript of Heliodorus, where the exegesis is attributed to a certain "Philip the Philosopher".[28] Scholars disagree about the dating of this text, some placing it in late Antiquity, others identifying it as the work of a 12th century monk, Philagathos of Cerami.[29] If the matter seems at present difficult to settle, I believe that the fragment fits best into the Justinianic period, the age of Damascius, Simplicius, John Lydus, Boethius. In particular we might compare the fragment with the anonymous dialogue *On Political Science* of the Justinianic period:[30] both texts recreate the literary fiction of a Platonic dialogue; both texts demonstrate a high Greek culture; both have Greek and Latin references; both give evidence of Christianity (the line between pagan and Christian is not sharply drawn); both demonstrate an advanced competence in late antique Platonic philosophy.[31] This last point, I think, is crucial, as it makes the dating to the 12th century less likely.[32] In the following, I will attempt to show in detail how "Philip the philosopher" makes use of theories derived from late antique Platonism in his exegesis of Heliodorus' novel.

The fragment opens with a scene closely based on the opening lines of the (pseudo-) Platonic *Axiochus*. An elderly man, going for a walk outside the city, is intercepted by two friends who tell him that Heliodorus' novel, the love story of Charicleia, is being mocked by literary buffs and who urge him to defend the book. The old man is reluctant—love stories are for the young!—but he then agrees to defend love, following the example of Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. The old man begins his defence of the novel as follows:

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28 The title given to this fragment in the manuscript is *Interpretation of the modest Charicleia from the lecture of Philip the Philosopher*. I cite the lines of the edition published by Colonna, *Heliodori Aethiopica*, 366–370. For a discussion of the fragment, see Lamberton (1986, 148–157).

29 See Goulet (2012); as far as I can see, Philip the philosopher is not covered in Riedweg, Horn, Wyrwa (2018). Heliodorus' novel, too, has been thought by some scholars to reflect late antique (Iamblichean) Platonism; see for example Mecella (2014, 647–654).

30 On this text see O'Meara (2003, 171–182). On a Justinianic context for Philip the Philosopher, see the references given by Mecella (2014, 633, n. 1).

31 The Platonic elements in "Philip" were noted by Praechter (1926, 646–647); Tarán (1992).

32 The case for Philagathos of Cerami has been made more recently by Duluş (2007), but I do not think that the textual parallels given are decisive.

> This book, my friends, is very much like Circe's brew: those who take it in a profane manner, it transforms into licentious pigs, but those who approach it in a philosophical way, in the manner of Odysseus, it initiates into higher things. The book is educational and teaches ethical philosophy, mixing the wine of knowledge into the water of the tale.
>
> Since human nature is divided into male and female and there is equally in each the sovereign power of virtue and vice, the book shows us both, in parallel, bearing witness to virtue and vice in each sex, and displaying good men in Calasiris, Theagenes, and Hydaspes, and good women in Persina and Charicleia. It presents more women and less men as notorious in vice since there is more vice scattered in the female race.[33]

This passage seems to echo the passage from Plato's *Republic* quoted at the beginning of this paper in that it not only refers to men and women sharing in virtue, but also mentions the idea of a 'scattering'.

The philosophical interpretation which the old man proposes to give of Heliodorus' novel, which he says contains ethical teaching, consists in a comparative display of how the various personages in the novel represent models of the virtues. Thus the priest Calasiris displays piety, prudence and moderation, Theagenes and Chariclea (the lovers) moderation, justice and courage, Hydaspes courage, whereas various other figures demonstrate the opposed vices.[34]

The old man's interpretation, however, shaping our moral character (ἦθος), has introduced us (εἰσήγαγεν) further within the gates of the story (76–77). This initiation reveals the hidden heart of the story: Charicleia is a symbol of the soul and of the soul's intellect which orders the soul; her beloved Theagenes is the soul's transcendent object of love. The story is no longer that of the protagonists

33 Philip the Philosopher, *Ad Charicleiam*, 35–44 (transl. Lamberton slightly modified): Ἡ βίβλος αὕτη, ὦ φίλοι, Κιρκαίῳ κυκεῶνι ὡμοίωται, τοὺς μὲν βεβήλως μεταλαμβάνοντας μεταμορφοῦσα πρὸς χοίρων ἀσέλγειαν, τοὺς δὲ κατ' Ὀδυσσέα φιλοσοφοῦντας μυσταγωγοῦσα τὰ ὑψηλότερα. παιδαγωγικὴ γὰρ ἡ βίβλος καὶ ἠθικῆς φιλοσοφίας διδάσκαλος, τῷ τῆς ἱστορίας ὕδατι τὸν οἶνον τῆς θεωρίας κεράσασα. καὶ ἐπειδὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἡ φύσις ⟨μὲν⟩ εἰς ἄρρεν καὶ θῆλυ μεμέρισται, ἀρετῆς δὲ καὶ κακίας ἔνεστι τὸ αὐτοκρατὲς ἐπίσης ἀμφοῖν, ἐκ παραλλήλου ἀμφότερα τίθησιν ἀρετὴν καὶ κακίαν ἑκάστῳ γένει προσμαρτυρήσασα, ἄνδρας μὲν στουδαίους Καλάσιριν καὶ Θεαγένην καὶ Ὑδάσπην ἐνδείξασα, γυναῖκας δὲ Περσίναν καὶ τὴν Χαρίκλειαν. ἐπὶ κακίᾳ δὲ διαβοήτους πλείους μὲν γυναῖκας, ἐλάττους δ' ἄνδρας ἀπεφηνε. πλεῖον γὰρ ἡ κακία τῷ γυναικείῳ φύλῳ ἐνέσπαρται.

34 The comparative display of virtues and vices through different personages is a rhetorical device (*epikrisis*) most familiar to us through Plutarch's *Parallel lives* and is also used, for example, in Damascius' *Life of Isidore*.

of the novel, of individual men and women, but that of the human soul, which, in the life here below, overcomes the passions (πάθη) and goes from "practical virtue", a "practical life" (93–95), to a higher life of contemplation of a transcendent Intellect:

> However, when she has left the yoke of oxen that has borne her and, bearing her torch, she has reached the temple and catches sight of Theagenes, she forgets everything and entirely engulfs the one she longs for, silently, in her soul. Understand what this riddle is saying to you! Whenever the soul transcends the material dyad, then the Intellect that lies outside of us approaches, the intellect of divine science, leading soul upward to the contemplation of soul's true family, it sees what is lovely to soul, taking up the torch of desire and injecting into soul the love of the highest wisdom.[35]

Soul's metaphysical homeland (πατρίς, 130) is intelligible reality, she comes from transcendent Intellect. By acquiring practical virtue in the sensible world, by dominating and surpassing the passions, soul returns to her true fatherland, impelled by the love of transcendent wisdom.[36] In short, the story of Chariclea is the story of the soul's return through virtue to the Good.

The two interpretations of Heliodorus' novel offered by "Philip the philosopher" are not just alternative readings, at different levels of the text, two kinds of exegesis. Rather, the first reading, the story of different personages, of different men and women exemplifying various virtues and vices, in ordering moral character, leads us, the readers of the novel, up to a higher vision, that of Charicleia, now representing the human soul which through virtue transcends passions and contemplates its true object of love. In other words, the two readings of the story correspond to degrees in a scale of moral progress, not only in the characters of the novel, but also in its readers, from control of the passions and from overcoming the passions to the intellectual virtue of contemplation. The

35 98–104: ἀλλ' ὅταν ἀφεῖσα τὸ ζεῦγος τῶν μόσχων τὸ ταύτην κομίζον καὶ πυρφοροῦσα τὸν ναὸν καταλάβῃ καὶ Θεαγένην θεάσηται, πάντων ἐπιλανθάνεται καὶ ὅλον ἀρρήτως τὸν ποθούμενον ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἐγκολπίζεται. σύνες ὅτι σοι λέγει τὸ αἴνιγμα. ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς ὑλικῆς δυάδος ὑπερτέρα γένηται, τότε ὁ ἔξωθεν ἡμῖν προσγινόμενος τῆς θεολογίας νοῦς καὶ πρὸς θέαν τοῦ γένους ἀνάγων τὴν ψυχήν, ὁρᾶται αὐτῇ χαριέστατος, δεχόμενος μὲν τὴν τοῦ πόθου λαμπάδα, ἐνιεὶς δὲ αὐτῇ τὸν ἔρωτα τῆς ὑψηλῆς ἐπιγνώσεως. The "material dyad" is an expression we find already in Gregory Nazianzus, *Or.* 21, 2 (*PG* 35, 1084c), which seems to mean here bodily existence (matter + form, or perhaps soul + body).

36 See Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.1.1.

scale corresponds to the late Platonic hierarchy of virtues. The first reading, that of the story of different virtues represented by different men and women, fits best, I would argue, the level of 'ethical virtue'.[37] Ethical virtues were thought not to imply each other necessarily: one could be brave, on this level, without being prudent.[38] So figures in Heliodorus' story exemplify some of the virtues and not others. However, the mutual implication of the virtues (ἀνταχολουθία) becomes necessary on the level of 'political virtue', where passions are controlled by reason, and even more so as one ascends the scale of virtues, when passions are purified, eliminated, and a purely intellectual life is at last reached. Here, differences between personages, between men and women, the supposed moral inferiority of women (on the level of 'ethical virtue'), disappear. It is the human soul, symbolized by Charicleia, which reaches the ultimate object of its love.

4

Plato's extraordinary ideas in the *Republic* about women and men with respect to the capacity for virtue, for knowledge, and consequently the possible competence to assume political leadership are not without complexity, if not ambiguity, and difficulty. The interpretative possibilities with respect to these ideas thus appear to be varied. We have considered above three examples of the reception and interpretation of these ideas in late antique Platonist authors. Proclus adopts what I would describe as a conservative/Aristotelian approach. The 'weakness' of women mentioned in the *Republic* is not physical, but metaphysical: it derives from the metaphysical inferiority of the nature of 'female' souls in relation to 'male' souls; female souls are naturally less receptive to virtue than are male souls; they are not equal in terms of receptive capacity. But in some cases male souls can occupy female bodies and thus reach male virtue, whereas some female souls can take on male bodies. If women (presumably with male souls) were to become philosopher-queens in an ideal political community, would they have the same status as philosopher-kings, as is suggested in the *Republic*, since they have the same virtues? Or would they have a subsidiary position, ancillary functions among the rulers, corresponding to the subsidiary role of female metaphysical principles (goddesses) in Proclus?[39]

37 See above at n. 7.

38 See Damascius, *In Phaedonem*, I, 138–190 (ed. Westerink).

39 See Baltzly's paper in the present volume.

Julian enthusiastically attributes all virtues to Eusebia, without restriction. She corresponds indeed to the ideal of the philosopher-queen and is superior in virtue to her emperor husband. For Julian, Constantius was very far from being a philosopher-king. Finally, in the case of Philip the philosopher, if my reading is correct, female moral inferiority obtains on the low level of 'ethical virtue', a level which would be shared by the men and women of Heliodorus' novel, in the context of the late Platonic hierarchy of virtue, with animals and children. When the human soul progresses to higher levels of virtue, when passions are controlled, then eliminated, and the soul reaches its fatherland, contemplation of transcendent Intellect, stories of women and men drop away and what counts now is soul reaching the object of its love. Would there then be a return to the cave, the return of the philosopher (male, female) to political rule? Our fragment does not deal with this. At any rate, if the examples considered in this paper show that the reception of Plato's ideas on the capacity for virtue in women and men is varied and reflects different circumstances and times, what is remarkable is that these ideas were not ignored, but remained alive, sometimes against all odds,[40] providing later readers with the occasion for new thinking.

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40 See, for example, Michael Psellos, *Praise of his Mother*, ed. Criscuolo, 1595–1601, and the paper by Walter in this volume.

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CHAPTER 5

Theodorus of Asine on the Equality of the Sexes: Traces of a Rhetorical Trope in the Fourth Century CE

John Dillon

1

At some point in the first half of the fourth century of the present era, the unorthodox and rather mysterious Neoplatonist philosopher Theodorus of Asine[1] composed an essay with the title "That the Virtue of Man and Woman is the Same." This theme, paradoxical though it appeared to most people, had a long history behind it. It is generally agreed to take its start from the well-known section of Plato's *Republic*, Book V, 451cff., where Socrates argues the point at some length. The passage is famous, but it may not be superfluous to quote some of it here:

> *Socrates*: "Which do we think right for watchdogs: should the females guard the flock, and hunt with males, and take a share in all they do, or should they be kept within doors as fit for no more than bearing and feeding their puppies, while all the hard work of looking after the flock is left to the males?"
> *Glaucon*: "They are expected to take their full share, except that we treat them as not quite so strong."
> *Socr*.: "Can you employ any creature for the same work as another, if you do not give them both the same upbringing and education (*trophé kai paideia*)?"
> *Glauc*.: "*No*."
> *Socr*. "Then, if we are to set women to the same tasks as men, we must teach them the same things."
> *Glauc*. "Yes."
>
> trans. CORNFORD

1 Theodorus is presented by Proclus, in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, as a rather dissident student of Iamblichus, who in many respects shares the views of Plotinus' follower Amelius. He will have 'flourished' around 300–320 CE. His fragments have been collected, with a good

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Socrates goes on to specify music and gymnastics and the arts of war. The discussion continues to 457c. The traditional argument that Socrates is confronting is one about Nature, φύσις. The normal Greek view was that the φύσεις of man and woman were different,[2] and therefore their activities (ἔργα) should be different. Socrates admits that he may have seemed to accept this at the outset of the discussion on the State (II 370a–b), when he had proposed that, since men differed in φύσις, they should practice different ἔργα. Now, however, he wants to go more deeply into the implications of that principle. Certainly, he says, the natures of man and woman are different, in so far as the one is concerned with begetting, and the other with bearing, children. From this it doubtless follows that a woman is exclusively fitted for certain activities (e.g. giving suck), and more fitted for certain others (e.g. changing nappies); but does difference in nature extend to such activities as fighting wars, or studying medicine or philosophy? Socrates argues, in effect, that the higher up the intellectual scale one goes, the more the natures (and thus the virtues) of man and woman are the same. Women may be less suited to the more active side of waging war, for example, but they are equally capable of studying medicine, mathematics or philosophy, and are equally fitted to become guardians.

These radical arguments reflect an interest that was being taken in the question, itself a subdivision of the larger question of φύσις versus νόμος, around the end of the fifth century.[3] No practical results followed for Athenian womanhood, but a vigorous tradition of radical questioning was set in train among philosophers.

This tradition flourished, not so much in Academic-Peripatetic circles, as among the Cynics and Stoics, the latter being, in matters of ethics, as we know, very much the heirs of the Cynics. The earliest recorded *dogma* on the subject is that of Socrates' follower Antisthenes, to the effect that "the virtue of men and women is the same".[4] He may have stated this in his *Oikonomikos*, which would then constitute the beginning of a succession of Cynic and Stoic treatises on the subject of female virtue and education. The founder of Stoicism, Zeno, in his *Republic*, followed Plato in declaring that Stoic sages should possess women in common (*SVF* I 269); we do not know that he declared that their *arête* was the same as that of men, but it is not improbable that he did. The sec-

commentary, by Werner Deuse (1973). The essay under discussion here is preserved, in summary form, by Proclus, in his *Essays on the Republic*, I, pp. 253–257.

2 As set out, for instance, by Meno, in Plato's *Meno* 71e–72a.

3 Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, produced probably in 392 BCE, constitutes a satirical reflection on such radical theories, from an orthodox viewpoint.

4 Diog. Laert. *Vit. Phil.* VI 12.

ond head of the School, Cleanthes, according to Diogenes Laertius (VII 175), composed a book with the title *That there is the same Virtue for a Man and a Woman*. As for Chrysippus, von Arnim (*SVF* III 253–254) gives passages of Lactantius (*Inst. Div*. 3.25) and Clement (*Strom*. 4.8) as evidence that he held this latter doctrine. It is quite probable that he in fact did, but neither of these passages identifies him satisfactorily, and they cannot be used as secure evidence. Clement, we may note, in the *Stromateis* passage, is adopting the doctrine for Christianity.

Not, in fact, until the late Stoic philosopher C. Musonius Rufus (c. 30–100 CE),[5] a member of the 'Stoic opposition' under Nero and later, do we get a clear statement of the theme. Discourses of his which are extant are entitled 'On whether one should give daughters the same education as sons', and 'That women also should do philosophy', both preserved in Stobaeus' *Anthology* (2.235, 23 ff. and 244, 6 ff., Wachsmuth-Hense).

In the first of these, he follows Plato in the *Republic* in starting from the analogy of the training of female horses and dogs and continues with a series of arguments for the identity of male and female virtues. Both, he argues, require wisdom, justice, moderation and courage. In relation to this last virtue, apart from arguing for the necessity of courage on the domestic front, he adduces the example of the Amazons to prove that martial valor is possible for women as well (p. 237, 5 ff.). That other women do not emulate them is, he maintains, merely a matter of lack of practice (ἀνασκησία). Women and men should therefore have the same nurture and education (τροφὴ καὶ παιδείᾱ), with the proviso that, since there is an admitted difference in their physical strength, certain activities, such as weaving or housework, remain more suitable for women than gymnastics or military service.

But this need not be an absolute principle. Certain men are weaker than women and could very well be put to carding wool:

> One might say, then, that all human tasks are common to both, and there is none that is necessarily reserved for one or the other, but some are admittedly more suitable to one sex or the other, and are therefore termed 'male' or 'female' tasks. Such, however, as have reference to virtue one might correctly state to be equally appropriate to either, inasmuch as we say that the virtues themselves are no more proper to one than to the other.
>
> 238, 16–24 W–H

5 If he was a Stoic at all; see on this the interesting recent paper by Brad Inwood (2017).

In the discourse on 'Whether Women should do Philosophy', he begins from the argument that men and women alike have received reason (*logos*) from the gods, which enables them to discern right and wrong. They also have the five senses, parts of the body (apart from the obvious variations), and the same natural impulse and affinity (ὄρεξις καὶ οἰκείωσις) to virtue. From this it follows that women are just as suited to philosophy as men (244, 10–20).

In both these essays, Musonius takes his start, either immediately or, more probably, mediately, from Plato, but he adds a number of points which take on importance in relation to Theodorus' treatment of the subject, as we shall see.

We have already observed Clement appropriating the doctrine of identity of the virtues of men and women for Christianity. With Plutarch, if not earlier, it is reclaimed for Platonism. In the introduction to his essay, or rather compilation, *On the Bravery of Women* (*Mul. Virt*. 243aff.)—addressed as it is to that distinguished career woman, Clea, the priestess of Delphi—he adduces various arguments in favor of the thesis. He mentions the fact that both poetry and prophecy are equally proper to both sexes, giving the examples of Sappho and the Sibyl, and goes on to compare the magnificence of Semiramis with that of Sesostris, the intelligence of Tanaquil with that of Servius Tullius, the nobility of Porcia or Timoclea with that of Brutus or Pelopidas. He then admits that virtues may take on different colorings, not only from differences in nature, but also from differences in customs and ways of life:

> "But with all this," he says, "let us not postulate many different kinds of bravery, wisdom and justice, so long as the individual dissimilarities do not cause any instance of these virtues to be untrue to its own definition".

2

It is against such a background, then, that we may view the essay of Theodorus. He begins by posing the question:

> Whether we should grant no virtue to women, or some virtue; and, if the latter, whether it is the same virtue as we attribute also to men, or different—viz., as is commonly asserted, to men courage exclusively, and to women moderation.[6]

6 Ap. Procl. *in R.* I 253, 1–6 Kroll.

Now, if we grant women no virtue, he says, we will render the city defective (*kolobos*), by allowing it to be composed of equal numbers of moral and amoral citizens, and by making the children of these, in the same way, respectively apt and inapt for education. If we grant them *some* virtue, but different from that of men, again each of the sets will be defective and half-complete, not having even its own perfect virtue, for if their virtue were perfect, then it would have to embrace *all* the four recognized virtues (this, it must be noted, being an application of the principle of the reciprocity (ἀνταϰολουθία) of the virtues, a doctrine originally Stoic, but long since received into the system of Platonist doctrine).[7] On the other hand, if we grant all the virtues to either sex, we have achieved what we were trying to prove.

This is the first of a series of five arguments on the topic. One might characterize it as an argument from the concept, or definition, of virtue. The second argument is based on 'anthropology,' and runs as follows (ibid. p. 253, 14–26):

> It is obvious that, if one surveys the various races of men in their different states, one finds male and female allotted the same tasks. For example, the Amazons are as brave as men, and so are the women of the Sauromatians, and among the Lusitanians women lead armies and enter public life and do all the things that men do among the Greeks, while the men work the loom and card the wool and do everything that women do among the Greeks. If this is agreed, then let us not think that the male is in any way superior to the female in respect of the acquiring of virtue, and let us not make our distinctions on the basis of custom (ἔθος) rather than nature (φύσις), which the practice of the same types of work, albeit in the different parts [of the world], demonstrates to be the same in both men and women.

This argument from cultural differences may well go back, in some form, to Chrysippus, who made extensive studies of various cultures in his search for what was according to nature and what was not, as we can see from extracts preserved by Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. Eth.* 192–194) from his works *On the State, On Justice*, and *On Duty*. Theodorus is seeking to make the same distinction between nature and custom as was being made earlier by Plutarch. We may note that in this context the Amazons are the prime example.

His third argument one might characterize as being based on theology (ibid. 253, 16–254, 10):

7 Interestingly, Theodorus attributes the doctrine instead to the Peripatetics (253, 12)!

> The doctrine of those who are skilled in things divine declares that the same goddess works the loom and does housework, and yet celebrates her distinctively in the midst of her temples by portraying her in full armor and as a leader of armies.
>
> And going on from this particular example to the whole race of gods, he (sc. Theodorus) asks whether, on the divine level at least, the same virtue is not to be granted to both male and female. Surely we must agree that it is to be so granted. For if it is absurd to speak of any god as being devoid of any virtue, then all of them must have every virtue; for that which is deficient in any virtue is not happy (*eudaimon*), and every god is happy. If, then, at that level male and female each partake of all virtue, it is plain, surely, by analogy that on our level also each of the sexes should have the same virtue as the sexes there.

This involves an argument for the parallelism between god and humans, which might not seem compelling, until one sets it against the background of the basic Platonic doctrine of 'Likeness to God' (ὁμοίωσις θεῶι), which assumes an analogy in respect of virtue between humans and gods. Against such a background, Theodorus' line of reasoning comes across as sophisticated and ingenious.

Theodorus' fourth argument is based upon the facts of physiology (ibid. 254, 10–29):

> If the organs out of which male and female are put together were constructed for the same purpose in each sex—the eyes for seeing, the ears for hearing, the brain for perception (αἰσθάνεσθαι),[8] the legs for walking, and all the other limbs for some common purpose—if, then, everything in the body serves the same purpose in both sexes, how can it be otherwise than that the parts of the soul be in common, and exist in both for the same purposes? If these serve the same purposes, then also their perfections are obviously the same, which in turn produce their perfect actions.

His conclusion is that each part of the soul serves the same purpose in both sexes, so that the soul in general must serve the same purpose. The virtues of which it is made up will thus be the same. An argument from analogy is employed here also, we observe, this time between body and soul.

8 Theodorus is being less than perspicuous here, but he seems to be reserving the brain as the organ for 'secondary' or 'common' perceptions, the processing of primary sense-impressions of the individual five senses.

A fifth argument (ibid. 254, 29–255, 24) serves as a kind of literary flourish to crown this probably less than serious essay. Theodorus claims to have heard wise words from an Egyptian prophet. Now, the Egyptian prophet takes a very similar attitude to the famous Egyptian priest who is reported in the *Timaeus* (22aff.) as addressing Solon, and this is pretty plainly the source of Theodorus' inspiration here. The Egyptian priest asserts that divine souls enter female bodies just as they do male bodies. In support of this assertion, he points out that Helen was one such soul, who was in no way less divine than her brothers the Dioscuri; being filled in soul and body with the graces of Aphrodite, and indeed being in some sort an Aphrodite herself, she came down from heaven to fool the barbarians, including Paris the Trojan, into thinking he had what he did not have, whereas in fact she went off to Egypt and partook of her first divine honors. Certain theatrical gentlemen among the Greeks told various disreputable stories about her, not knowing the truth.[9]

This being true, then, how can it be that the virtues of men and women are not the same? Or are we going to agree that men as well as well as women can be possessed by the gods with the gift of prophecy, as is the case with Diotima in the *Symposium* and various other ladies (Theoxena and Berenice are mentioned), and then deny them moderation, courage and wisdom?

3

This, in sum, is the content of Theodorus' essay, which, as I say, was notable enough for Proclus to insert it into his *Essays on the Republic* a hundred years later, although Theodorus was not generally one of his approved authorities—as can be seen from his various rather dismissive references to him in the *Commentary on the Timaeus*.[10] It is in connection with, and, I think, against the background of this essay, that a passage in Book I of Quintus of Smyrna's poem, *The Fall of Troy*, takes on a certain significance.

In Book I, Quintus tells us the story of the coming of Penthesilea and her Amazons to aid the Trojans, and of her death at the hands of Achilles. Into this narrative, for which he relies on traditional sources, he introduces a passage of his own composition, as follows (ll. 403–476). The ladies of Troy look on at the warlike deeds of the Amazons, and of Penthesilea in particular. Suddenly,

9 This is presumably primarily a reference to Euripides—though he made amends in his *Helen*.

10 E.g. II 142, 27 ff. Diehl; II 277, 24 ff.; II 215, 3 ff.; III 64, 10 ff.; III 190, 10 ff.

one of them, Hippodameia, daughter of Antimachus, and wife of Tisiphonus, is moved to fiery speech. Why, she asks, would we not take a lesson from the Amazons and join the battle ourselves? Her arguments in favor of this course of action are interesting, in view of what we have been looking at:

> Dear friends, let us assume a bold heart in our breasts
> like to our men, who battle with the enemy for our country
> on behalf of our children and ourselves, never relaxing
> from the struggle. Let us too place in our minds
> a warlike spirit, and take thought for combat.
> For we are not far different from lusty youths,
> but like them there is valour also in us;
> for we have eyes and knees like them, and all else is similar –
> the light and the flowing air are common to us all;
> our nourishment is no different. What has the god given men
> that he gives not as well to us? Let us not, then,
> shrink from the fight!

She then points to Penthesilea:

> Do you not see that woman greatly outshining
> close-fighting warriors? And yet she is not of our race,
> nor is this her own city, but she fights for a foreign king
> out of high spirit, and is not daunted by men,
> placing in her mind strength and an invincible attitude.

So then, we have a contrast made by Hippodameia between the manlike courage and spirit of the Amazon Queen and the spiritless ladies of Troy, and in the process of making her point, she employs two of the five arguments adduced by Theodorus in his essay, the fourth (that from physiology), and the second (that from anthropology).

Fired by this speech, the ladies throw aside their distaffs, arm themselves, and rush to the gates—being compared here by Quintus, rather wickedly (440 ff.),[11] to honey-bees swarming, preparatory to sallying forth to the bright flower-meadows, winter now being past.

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11 He might, after all, have used the more warlike image of wasps issuing forth from their nest to do battle (*Iliad* 16, 259 ff.), since he was much given to borrowing from Homeric similes, rather than this distinctly bucolic comparison. I am prepared to credit Quintus with being playful here, rather than simply inept.

Just in time, however, a wiser, older lady, Theano, commands their attention, and recalls them to their senses by pointing out that the Amazons have been in this business a very long time, whereas they themselves have never set foot on a battlefield.

In the process of dissuasion, Theano actually invokes Theodorus' fifth and final argument that was presented to him by the Egyptian priest, but she uses it, of course, to prove the opposite point. Rumor has it, she says, that Penthesilea is of divine blood, being a daughter of Ares himself, and it is precisely for this reason that her deeds are not to be emulated by mortal women (where the other Amazons fit into this theory is not quite clear!). She also replies to Hippodameia's first argument, that from the common nature of man and woman. Yes, she says (463–466), human nature is the same in all people, but yet we turn each of us to different tasks, and we should stick to those tasks to which we are best suited—in the case of women, the loom and other household occupations.

Theano wins her point. The ladies subside and are content henceforth to watch the contest from the sidelines.

4

The case does not admit of absolute proof, but in the face of the absence of other sources, I am attracted to the possibility that Quintus was stimulated by Theodorus' essay into introducing this amusing episode into his otherwise rather tedious and wholly traditional narrative. If we take this to be the case, it would serve to date Quintus a little more satisfactorily to the middle of the fourth century CE,[12] besides providing what would surely be a unique case of influence by a philosopher on a poet in this period.

As for the cause of women's liberation, I doubt that either Theodorus or, much less, Quintus was passionately concerned with it, but at least they can go

12 As things stand, his dating is quite uncertain. Only a reference in a simile to gladiatorial shows (VI 531ff.) seems to indicate a fourth-century date, rather than a still later one, since they were suppressed by Theodosius (379–395 CE). A prophecy uttered by Calchas in Book XIII 335ff., which speaks of the descendants of Aeneas ruling 'from the rising to the setting sun', should at least precede the fall of the Western empire. The evidence of language does not help us very much, as Quintus writes in pseudo-Homeric hexameters, but he is utilized by the fifth-century CE poet Nonnus, and himself borrows from Oppian's *Halieutica* (composed in 177–180 CE), and this provides us with some extreme limits. The Budé editor, François Vian, makes an attempt to situate him in the third century (Intro., p. xix—xxii), but his arguments, though sound enough, are not compelling.

on record as having given the issue an airing in this rather unpromising period of world history; and Theodorus' essay survived to attract the attention of Proclus a century later.

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CHAPTER 6

The Myth of Er and Female Guardians in Proclus' *Republic Commentary*

Dirk Baltzly

Introduction

Proclus' view of the *skopos* of the Republic makes it *both* a work of ethics and a work of political theory since the justice of souls and of political arrangements (πολιτεῖαι) are one and the same (*in R.* I 11, 13–14). In light of this fact, Proclus takes *Republic* V's recommendation that there should be both male and female Guardians as a serious and desirable political proposal. Indeed, he is perhaps even more explicit than Plato in insisting that there will be female Auxiliaries and perhaps even female Workers will share the same occupation with men.[1]

Apart from these generalities, however, Proclus says very little about women's political participation in the ordering of the ideal city. But a recurring theme in Proclus' commentary is that political arrangements are just to the extent that they effectively mirror the political order of the cosmos. The administration of justice to souls that is described in the Myth of Er is thus not merely an adornment at the end of the dialogue, but important information about the cosmic paradigm to which the just human πόλις should assimilate itself. This paper will consider the role of female Guardians in Proclus' interpretation of the *Republic* as a serious suggestion in political theory by looking at the cosmic paradigms for women's administration of justice in the Myth of Er.

In my previous work on feminine metaphysical principles (which are associated with procession and division into multiplicity in Proclus' philosophy) I argued that these are generally subordinate to masculine ones and that Proclus' metaphysics tends to project the subordination of women to a cosmic scale.[2] In this chapter I develop this thought further by looking at Proclus' reading of

1 Cf. *in R.* I 241, 20–24: "If, then, individuals participate to a greater or lesser degree in the perfection appropriate to being human, nonetheless the nature is common between males and females, and all the aptitudes will be common to both, whether it be that appropriate to be a guardian, to be an auxiliary, or to live the life of a craftsman." (Unless otherwise noted, translations from Proclus' *Republic Commentary* are my own.)

2 Baltzly (2013).

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the significance of the divinities that feature in the Myth of Er (the Sirens, the Fates) and considering them insofar as they provide a paradigm for women's participation in a just city-state. Though Proclus does not tell us much about the way in which he sees female Guardians completing the human πόλις, he does describe the role of these goddesses in the cosmic one. Since he explicitly asserts that the justification for coordinate male and female Guardians is the presence of male and female divinities in the administration of the cosmos (*in* R. I 247, 16–26), we may look to the paradigm to investigate the nature of the copy. One point to emerge from this investigation is that the female Guardians are likely to be subordinated to their male counter-parts if they play a role in the ideal πόλις analogous to the female divinities in the Myth of Er. A second point is that there are aspects of their role that seem to resemble some features of what has come to be called 'the ethics of care'.

1 Proclus' Reading of the Women of the Myth

1.1 *Necessity*

Proclus' interpretation of the myth preserves the distinctively feminine and maternal character of Necessity. Necessity has multiple connotations for a Platonist, and Proclus is eager to clear away potential misunderstandings of the figure of Necessity in the Myth of Er. Though some of his predecessors had aligned Necessity, as well as the Mother of the Gods (or Rhea), with *matter*, this correlation is mistaken for at least two reasons according to Proclus. First, matter is barren and chilled (or lacking in vital heat). It also needs the things that are contained within it, so that its claim to be regarded as a "mother" is somewhat attenuated by the fact that it did not generate that which is in it.[3] By contrast, Necessity (as well as the Mother of Gods) are "mothers who are generative powers that are incapable of being encompassed by inferior things and instead make room for their products within themselves, enclosing their processions within their own limitless cavities (κόλπος)."[4]

Differences in the function of Necessity in the *Timaeus* (47e5) and Fate or *Heimarmenê* in the *Statesman* (272e5) show that Necessity in the Myth of Er

3 *in* R. II 205, 4–5 ἄγονον καὶ ἀπεψυγμένην καὶ δεομένην ἐκείνων ὧν καλεῖται μήτηρ.

4 *in* R. II 204, 29–205, 2 αἱ γὰρ μητέρες γόνιμοι δυνάμεις εἰσὶν ἀπερίληπτοι τοῖς καταδεεστέροις, εἰς ἑαυτὰς μὲν χωροῦσαι τὰ ἀπογεννώμενα, κλείουσαι τὰς προόδους ἐκείνων ἐν τοῖς ἀπείροις ἑαυτῶν κόλποις. Cf. in R. II 205.13–16 οὐκ ἄρα ὡς ὑποδοχαί εἰσιν] μητέρες, ἀλλ' ὡς γεννητικαὶ τῶν παραχθέντων· ἐπειδὴ δὲ οὐκ ἔξω ἑαυτῶν γεννῶσιν, ἃ δὴ καὶ λέγονται γεννᾶν, ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτῶν τὰ γεννηθέντα παρ' αὐτῶν κόλποις ἑδράζουσιν.

is not to be equated with them, either. Necessity in the *Timaeus is ordered* by virtue of being persuaded by Intellect. By contrast, Necessity in the myth *orders* the encosmic lives of souls. Moreover, to the extent that Timaean Necessity orders anything, it orders *bodies*. By contrast, Necessity in the Myth of Er orders *souls* rather than bodies. Finally, Necessity in the Myth of Er has jurisdiction over other divinities too, since she is the mother of the Fates and these are themselves goddesses.[5] Nor can the myth's Necessity be equated with Fate in the *Statesman*, for the latter seems to operate in a manner opposed to divine providence, while the role of Necessity and the Fates in the Myth of Er is clearly an implementation of the gods' providence for souls—an implementation that, of course, leaves the gods blameless for the harms that souls undergo both in their incarnations and in their subsequent punishments.[6]

So what *is* Necessity and what does she symbolically represent? On the basis of her role as the mother of the Fates in Hesiod's *Theogony* (901–907), Proclus tells us that she is, in fact, Themis. But Necessity's identification with a divinity in Hesiod is less significant than her *function* for Proclus. Ananke in Plato's text indicates "the leader of every cosmic order, whether in souls or in nature, who defines and preserves all things in an unswerving manner" (*in R.* II 207.16–18). The inviolable character of this cosmic leadership is communicated through the name 'Themis' and this permits a two-fold connection to the text of the *Timaeus*. On the one hand, the supposition that the universe is not "finest among the things that have come to be" is one that "it is not *themis* or licit to say" (*Ti.* 29a4). On the other hand, it is not *themis* for the Demiurge to do anything other than what is fine (*Ti.* 30a6). In short, the governance of Themis cannot be transgressed, and these iron-clad laws apply to all things in the cosmic order, whether high or low.

> It cannot be violated by those things that come first through superiority, nor by those that come last through their defective nature. [Rather, there is] a single providential order that has taken all things under its power and both eternal beings and things that come to be have been ordered and arranged in their appropriate station by a single providence, and the whole republic of the cosmos is never upset nor able to admit anything adventitious—an order through which all things are preserved in inviolable bonds.[7]

5 *in R.* I 206, 10–21.

6 *R.* 617e3–6 with Proclus' extensive discussion at *in R.* II 277, 8–279, 6.

7 *in R.* II 208, 9–15 οὐ τῶν πρώτων δι' ὑπεροχήν, οὐ τῶν ἐσχάτων δι' ἔλλειψιν, μιᾷ τῶν πάντων κατειλημμένων προνοίᾳ καὶ τεταγμένων τῶν ἀϊδίων καὶ ταττομένων τῶν γενητῶν ἐν τῇ πρεπούσῃ μοίρᾳ

Proclus, as is occasionally his wont, adds his own thoughts on the subject. The connection between the identity of Necessity as Themis and what is *themis* in the *Timaeus* affords Proclus the opportunity to connect the dialogues. The Myth of Er reveals a cosmic paradigm for the earthly republic. In this parallel Ananke / Themis plays a role in relation to the administration of the cosmic political order that is parallel to that of the *Demiurge*. She is a divine monad and the cause of the order within the cosmos, while her daughters seem to have a more proximate role in cosmic administration. This aside by Proclus confirms the methodological approach of this chapter. We can and should see the feminine divinities in the Myth of Er as analogous to the female Guardians of the ideal city.

1.2 *The Sirens*

In the case of the Sirens, Proclus is similarly anxious to clear away potential misidentifications.[8] The Sirens are *not* to be equated with the Muses, Proclus insists. The Muses are higher beings than the Sirens since the latter's harmonised, circular *motion* upon the whorls indicate that they belong *to the order of souls*. While they belong to the psychic order, however, the specifically *circular* motion associated with the Sirens shows that they are *intellectual* souls. This reads the myth in the light of the claim from *Laws* X (897c) that circular motion is symbolic of intellect. The fact that the Sirens' movements are harmonised accords with *Timaeus* 35a, since these harmonised motions flow from the harmonies within the souls.

Not only must one distinguish Sirens from Muses, Proclus also seeks to establish these Sirens as distinct from other Sirens that occur in Plato's works—specifically in the *Phaedrus* (259a) and the *Cratylus* (403d). The distinction in the *Republic Commentary* mirrors that in the *Cratylus Commentary*, but the latter text is clearer:

> The great Plato knows three genera of Sirens: the celestial which is under the kingdom of Zeus, the generative which is under Poseidon, and the purificatory which is under Hades. It is common to them all to subject all things to their commanding-gods by way of harmonious motion. This is why they wish to unite the soul, when it is in heaven, with the ways of life there. But it is fitting that those souls living in generation should "sail past

καὶ τῆς ὅλης τοῦ κόσμου πολιτείας διὰ ταύτην οὐδέποτε μετακινουμένης οὐδὲ ἐπεισοδιῶδές τι παραδέξασθαι δυναμένης, δι' ἣν ἐν θεσμοῖς ἀλύτοις τὰ πάντα φρουρεῖται. Cf. *Theol. Plat.* VI 100, 23–101, 5.

8 *in R.* II 237.16, ff.

> them" (*Phdr*. 259a7), just like the Homeric Odysseus, if indeed the sea is an image of generation, lest they be lured astray by generation. It is also fitting that, when they have come to Hades, they be attached to this god through their intellectual thoughts. As a result, Plato knows about classes of gods, daemons, and souls in the kingdom of Hades, souls that dance around the god, charmed by the Sirens there.
>
> *in Cra*. 88.15–26, trans. DUVICK

The *Republic Commentary* insists that what is common to all these kinds of Sirens is that they establish harmonies that are *corporeal* in form, while the Muses bestow *intellectual* harmonies. The elevating powers of these corporeal harmonies depend upon the higher, intellectual harmonies of the Muses (*in R*. II 239, 8–14) who are similarly musical in nature, but ontologically prior to the Sirens. The generative Sirens that are subordinate to Poseidon present human souls with two possibilities. While the better souls are elevated by these corporeal harmonies, other deficient souls become bewitched by them and remain below at the level of Nature (*in R*. II 68, 8–13).

1.3 *The Fates*

Though they are discussed prior to the Fates in Plato's text, the Sirens are relatively minor characters in Proclus' reading of the Myth of Er. Instead, his focus is upon Ananke and the Fates who play the role of a monad and a triad respectively (*in R*. II 100, 8–9). Operating together, they are co-causes of the cosmic laws that render the universe a paradigm of political order for the ideal state.

While Ananke may be wholly hypercosmic, the Fates (who are her daughters) are both hypercosmic-and-encosmic. This, Proclus argues, is what is communicated by the detail in the myth that says that the Fates sometimes *touch* and sometimes *do not touch* the whorls that rotate on the spindle of Necessity. Thus, unlike the Sirens who seem to be thoroughly encosmic divinities, the Fates are both encosmic-and-hypercosmic (II 239, 26). Proclus offers a thorough symbolic reading of the details that Plato gives concerning the Fates. I will discuss only those that have a direct bearing on our concerns.

The Fates are described as the *daughters* of Ananke (Themis) because the function of their monad (Ananke) is *divided* between them. While she is the single cause for cosmic order, they are multiple causes of distinct levels of the operation of providence within the cosmos. The metaphor for the operation of providence in their case is that of weaving, but, as we shall see, their feminine character—making them daughters rather than sons—relates to their essentially passive role and the way in which they implement general cosmic principles in individual cases.

The fact that the Fates are said to be seated upon *thrones* gives Proclus the opportunity to connect the myth under discussion at this point in the *Republic* with the palinode of the *Phaedrus*. The thrones are analogous to the vehicles or chariots of the gods in the latter myth.[9] No especially gendered interpretation of the daughters of Ananke leaps immediately from this intertextual connection. But the myth of the *Phaedrus* forms part of the foundation for Proclus' belief in souls themselves being male or female and, moreover, having astral bodies that are sexed. In order to appreciate Proclus' students' understanding of the significance of the intertextual connections between the enthroned Fates and the divine souls in the *Phaedrus* with their psychic vehicles, we should now review Proclus' doctrine of sexed souls and vehicles.

2 Male and Female Souls in Proclus

Commentators have frequently noted a marked ambivalence about women's moral and intellectual competence in Plato. On the one hand, the *Republic* argued that men and women do not differ from one another except in their reproductive biology. On the other hand, the *Timaeus* suggests that a soul's incarnation in a female body is a warning to souls that have led bad lives in their previous incarnation to mend their ways or risk an incarnation that is even worse. The clear implication is that the souls that animate female human bodies have suffered from moral and/or cognitive defects in previous incarnations.

Proclus' resolution of these internal tensions within the Platonic corpus involves the supposition that souls and their psychic vehicles have an innate sex.[10] This is not a matter of their role in biological reproduction—as the sex of human beings is. Rather, the *intrinsic gender* of a soul is determined by its place in the series of emanation that trace back to male or female divinities. Gender is, of course, a contested concept and the most uncontroversial sense of it is the *social interpretation* placed upon biological sex, together with the expectations about behaviour that go with it. At the level of the divine, however, this distinction seems to be reversed. On the one hand, Proclus thinks that every

9 For a similar connection between thrones and psychic vehicles, see *Theol. Plat.* VI 108., 13–16.

10 This conclusion is argued for en passant in Baltzly (2013), but developed fully in Schultz (2019). In particular Schultz sees the key role of the *Phaedrus* in Proclus' reasoning for the idea that souls must have an innate gender.

soul—whether divine or human—has a series of psychic vehicles and at least the first of these is always fitting for the nature of the soul in question. Hence the vehicles of male and female divine souls will differ from one another in some way or other (*in Ti.* III 293, 14–17). But these differences in "bodies" do not relate to different roles in biological reproduction. Rather, the distinctions in psychic vehicles reflect an intrinsic gender identity that is causally prior to a kind of quasi-sexual differentiation between vehicles. Thus a feminine soul will have an astral body that is suited to a gendered psychic nature that is causally prior to that soul's vehicle.

In Proclus' understanding of these matters, the mythic passage from the *Phaedrus* in which the gods lead a procession of souls for a tour of the Forms looms large. There are two salient features of the myth in the *Phaedrus*. First, there is the fact that souls are placed in ranks behind a particular leading god among the Olympians (*Phdr.* 247a1–3; 250b7–8). Second, the nature of the love that a soul experiences once it has fallen into the realm of Becoming and assumed its 'oyster body' is influenced by the particular god he or she was assigned to (252c–253c). Followers of Zeus, for instance, are philosophical and authoritative (252e3), while those who followed Hera seek a kingly lover (253b1–2).

Proclus supposes that this means that souls themselves are gendered by virtue of the nature of their leader-god.

> And how are they not going to be assimilated to their leader-gods, and, just as they get the rest of their character-type from them too, so receive this special characteristic of either the male or the female from them.
>
> *in Ti.* III 283, 21–25, trans. TARRANT

> Since the female exists even among the gods, what is there to prevent the souls imitating their personal leaders in this way?
>
> *in Ti.* III 293, 2–3[11]

Proclus regards the gender of souls not merely as a relational property that they acquire by virtue of belonging to a 'tour group' headed by a male or female divinity.

11 Schultz (2019) observes an interesting detail that I certainly missed (much to my embarrassment since I've been working on Hermias' Commentary). Proclus' classmate Hermias does not seem to place as much emphasis on souls resembling their leader-gods in respect of sex; cf. *in Phdr.* 137, 20–24 (Couvreur) = 143, 20–24 (Lucarini & Moreschini).

> … so there is a single resemblance [sc. to the soul's leader-god] applying to all individual souls, a single division with reference to the cause of both of these […]. [T]he differences between souls come not from their bodies nor from relations of this or that kind, as some persons claim, but *from their own particular substance*; for their being organised under different leaders and their distribution are aspects of their substance.
>
> *in Ti.* III 264, 11–19, my emphasis

So the gender of divine intellects, divine souls and lesser orders of souls for Proclus is one and the same as the ideological objective of the assignment of gender among actual human beings. Psychic gender is supposed to be an essential feature of a soul that *explains and justifies* the different expectations that a society has of men and women. Those of us who insist that gender is contingent and wholly socially constructed do so against the notion of an intrinsically gendered nature that Proclus assumes. Radical feminists say our gendering practices create a putative 'feminine nature' that is not really natural. By contrast, Proclus locates a causal origin of this feminine nature even prior to the particular form that it assumes in female humans.

So what is characteristic of the operations of feminine gods? When we turn to Proclus' descriptions of the operations of feminine divinities, we find associations that are in keeping with Pythagorean columns of coordinated pairs reported in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1.5, 986a22.[12] In that list, male and female are coordinated with key pairs of opposites in Proclus' metaphysics: Limited and Unlimited, One and Plurality, as well as Rest and Motion. In the most general of terms, Proclus thinks that female gods or metaphysical principles are distinguished by playing a *pluralising* or prolific and *differentiating* role in the emanation from the One.[13] In the Pythagorean column of oppositions, those of the female side are implicitly or explicitly regarded as *subordinate and inferior* to those on the male side.[14] This is also true of Proclus' oppositions and there are occasions where he not only notes the subordination of the Unlimited to the Limited, or Difference to Sameness, but extends this to male and female.[15]

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12 On gender and numbers in early Pythagoreanism, see Burkert (1972, 30–37 and 432–438).

13 Cf. *Theol. Plat.* IV 33, 15–34, 11; 85, 2–4; 86, 20–87, 4; 112, 17–18 Καὶ γὰρ ἡ ἑτερότης αὐτὸ τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ γόνιμόν ἐστι τῶν θεῶν; *in Cra.* 70, 7–8.

14 Buchan (1999, 16 ff.).

15 Proclus, *in Prm.* 741, 5–9 καὶ τὸ μὲν κρεῖττον τῶν ἐναντίων μιμεῖται τὸ πέρας, τὸ δὲ καταδεέστερον μιμεῖται τὸ ἄπειρον· ὅθεν δὴ καὶ οἱ φυσικοὶ λέγουσι τὸ χεῖρον τῶν ἐναντίων στέρησιν εἶναι τοῦ πέρατος (cf. Aristotle's *Ph.* 3.2, 201b16–26).

> Thus it is just as it is among the intelligible beings, where the Limited dominates over the Unlimited. Likewise among the intellectual beings, the Male dominates over the Female; and in the hypercosmic things, Sameness dominates over Difference, and Similarity over Dissimilarity. So too in the case of the soul, the revolution of the Same dominates over the revolution of the Different.
>
> *in Ti.* II 262, 21–26, trans. BALTZLY

In what does this dominance consist? Answers emerge from Proclus' reading of the summary of the arrangements relating to male and female Guardians that is recapitulated at the opening of the *Timaeus* (17a–19b). Proclus' general approach to this part of the *Timaeus* is that the recapitulation is not a digression wholly unrelated to the subsequent cosmological content of Timaeus' speech. Rather, the re-presentation of the ideal city in the *Republic* is a symbolic foreshadowing of the order or constitution of the cosmos. Where we have deities that have one sex or the other, the divinities perform the same tasks, just as the male and female Guardians in the *Republic* do. Proclus, however, notes that the male sex performs the task in a *primary* manner, while the goddesses perform it in a *subordinate* manner.[16]

> Hence in mortal creatures too nature has revealed the female to be weaker in all things than the male. Indeed, everything that proceeds from the male is also brought to birth by the female, preserving its subordinate role. So Hera proceeds in company with Zeus, giving birth to all things with the Father, for which reason she is called his equal accomplisher.[17]
>
> *in Ti.* I 46, 24–47, 1, trans. TARRANT

Proclus goes on to enumerate other paired gods and goddesses who cooperate to produce certain aspects of the cosmos. Notable for our purposes is the partnership of Chronos and Rhea, since Rhea holds every power of her male consort in her κόλπος (lap or interior cavity). Similarly, in the case of Ouranos and Gaia, for she is mother of all the things of which he is the father. These creative principles are then coordinated with the higher-level principles of Limit (male) and Unlimited (female).

We noted above that the feminine side of the Pythagorean table of opposites includes not only the pluralising principle of the Unlimited, but also Difference.

16 *in Ti.* I 46, 21–23, ὅπου δὲ καὶ διῄρηται, κοινὰ τὰ ἔργα ἐστὶ τοῦ ἄρρενος καὶ θήλεος τῶν ὁμοταγῶν, πρώτως μὲν ⟨ἀποτελούμενα⟩ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄρρενος, ὑφειμένως δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ θήλεος.

17 διὸ καὶ ἰσοτελὴς αὐτῷ προσαγορεύεται, cf. *Orph. fr.* 163, Kern 1963.

This aligns the feminine with the circle of the Different in the *Timaeus*' account of the immaterial "structure" of the World Soul and all lesser souls. But in this psychogony, the circle of the Different is oriented toward the grasp of *sensible things* and it is through its operation that the World Soul has correct opinions about them, while the circle of the Same is oriented toward *intelligible objects* and it is through it that the World Soul has knowledge of what is changeless (*Ti.* 37a2–c5).[18]

Proclus connects these two cognitive functions to different roles in the administration of providence. The circle of the Same is intellectual and thus male (*in Ti.* II 242, 10). It is "intellectual, scientific, suffused with divine wisdom, capable of leading things back [to their source], and such as to include the causes of things."[19] By contrast, the circle of the Different, with which the feminine is aligned, is "proximate to particulars" and thus:

> binds itself with sensible beings, spreads providence over secondary existences, is such as to craft things (*technikon*), and includes whatever else is akin to these properties.
>
> *in Ti.* II 241, 27–29, trans. BALTZLY

So to sum up, in the downward or creative phase of the universe, masculine divinities differ from female ones by virtue of the fact that the latter duplicate in a secondary way what the masculine divinities create in a primary way. This secondary manner is presented in terms that relate to interiority—as if the male divinities articulate what is concealed inside the female ones. In reversion or return of the lower orders upon the higher ones, masculine divine principles elevate what is below them in the ontological order without ever losing their own focus upon their higher causes. Female divinities, however, being assimilated to the circle of the Different, exercise a kind of hands-on providence that is oriented downward toward their products. This hands-on providence is 'technical' and involves division and the binding of these female technicians to that over which they exercise providence.

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18 I am grateful to Schultz (2019) for bringing home to me more clearly and forcefully the significance of the way in which female souls' greater share in Difference orients them toward the sensible realm, in contrast to male souls' greater share of Sameness which orients them toward the intelligibles. See *in Ti.* II 262, 21–26.

19 *in Ti.* II 241, 24–26 ἧς τὸ μὲν τοῖς νοητοῖς συναφές ἐστι νοερόν, ἐπιστημονικόν, φρονήσει θείᾳ διαλάμπον, ἀναγωγόν, τὰς αἰτίας τῶν πραγμάτων περιέχον.

3 The Gendered Administration of Providence in the Myth of Er

The Myth of Er contains a whole host of agents whose actions contribute to the 'tough love' that souls are subject to in Plato's theory of post-mortem punishment and rehabilitation. Some of these agents are feminine and we should now consider the extent to which their activities conform to the general character of divine feminine activity for Proclus.

3.1 *The Actions of Ananke*

Ananke / Themis is, as we noted above, the figure in the myth that Proclus equates most directly to the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*. However, his interpretation of the spindle of Ananke in the *Republic* and its relation to the heavens devised by the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* follows the pattern of secondary, inferior creation or causation we noted in the previous section. At II 203, 3 ff. Proclus takes up the question of the relation between the heaven or Ouranos and the spindle that is described in the myth. They are fundamentally the same, but they differ in the manner in which they are conceived.[20] But the differences in the way in which they are conceived suggest that the heaven—produced by the male Demiurge—is the *truer and more revelatory conception* (ἀληθεστέραν καὶ ἐποπτικωτέραν ἐπιβολήν, *in R.* II 201, 1).[21] When we apprehend this eternal product of timeless divine creation under its truer and more revelatory aspect as "the heaven", then we see it as a product of the Father and Maker of all. This name indicates its nature and its form as something established from Demiurgic causes.[22] However, when we conceive of it as the spindle of Ananke, we do so in symbolic terms dictated by the form of the myth. The conception of it as a spindle does not make reference to its *creative* (masculine) causes but rather to its *sustaining* (feminine) cause.[23] All this suggests that the different

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20 *in R.* II 203, 9–11 λέγω τοίνυν, ὅτι κατὰ μὲν τὸ ὑποκείμενον ταὐτόν ἐστιν ὅ τε οὐρανὸς καὶ ὁ ἄτρακτος, νοεῖται δὲ διχῶς ἕτερος. 'Fundamentally' is Festugière's gloss on κατὰ μὲν τὸ ὑποκείμενον and I think this catches the sense appropriately. What could more literal senses even mean?

21 The exegesis of the parallels between Ananke and the Demiurge in *Theol. Plat.* V 23 does not so obviously make Ananke's relation to the spindle a deficient version of the relation of the Demiurge to the heavens. In that text, he *creates* universal providence in a manner that is free from division or plurality (*ameristôs*), while she *preserves* it unswervingly (*aklinôs*) (102, 17–18).

22 *in R.* II 204, 1–6 ὡς μὲν ὅρος τοῦ κόσμου παντὸς τοῦ ὁρατοῦ καὶ περιέχων πάντα καὶ ὡς δημιούργημα τοῦ δημιουργοῦ καὶ πατρός, οὐρανὸς ἔστιν τε καὶ λέγεται (τὴν γὰρ φύσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἥδε ἡ ἐπωνυμία δηλοῖ, καθ' ἣν ὑφέστηκεν ἀπὸ τῆς δημιουργικῆς αἰτίας). For Syrianus' connection of the concepts of ὅρος and οὐρανός, see *in Ti.* III 175, 4.

23 *in R.* II 204, 5–6. Approaching it under the conception of Ouranos, we apprehend it ἀπὸ

ways of looking at the same thing—ὑποκείμενον ταὐτόν ἐστιν ὅ τε οὐρανὸς καὶ ὁ ἄτρακτος, νοεῖται δὲ διχῶς—are not mere conceptual distinctions. They are distinctions grounded in the different roles played by the masculine and feminine divinities in the co-creation of the Heaven / Spindle. What the one causes in a primary and superior manner (viz. Demiurge + Ouranos), the other causes in a secondary and weaker manner (viz. Ananke + Spindle). This is just what we would expect to find given Proclus' general characterisation of masculine and feminine creation on the part of the gods (*in Ti.* I 46, 21–23). The superiority of apprehending it in one way—the ἀληθεστέραν καὶ ἐποπτικωτέραν ἐπιβολήν—is grounded in the superior mode of causation associated with the masculine principle.

3.2 *The Actions of the Sirens*

If Ananke finds a higher counterpart in the masculine Demiurge, the Sirens are contrasted with, and differentiated from, a higher *feminine* principle—the Muses. The terms of the differentiation, however, are consistent with the idea that it is characteristic of feminine principles to be drawn to the enmattered things that are subordinate to them. Recall that the point of contrast between Muses and Sirens is that the latter produce *enmattered* harmonies, while the former bestow intellectual ones. Moreover, there are no ambivalent counterparts of the *genesiourgos* Sirens for the Muses. These dangerous Sirens, under the authority of Poseidon, sing harmonies that attract unwary souls deeper into the natures of material things (*in R.* II 68, 3–16). As such, these feminine singers are contrasted to the anagogic or elevating function of masculine principles noted above at *in Ti.* II 241, 24–26. If the feminine Muses (who elevate the souls who apprehend their intellectual harmonies) appear to play a masculine, consistently anagogic function relative to the Sirens, it must be remembered that they too derive this power from the monad of their series, who is the masculine Apollo (*in Cra.* 102, 10–103, 6). This is Proclus' reading of Apollo's epithet, "Leader of the Muses".

3.3 *The Actions of the Fates*

By virtue of belonging in the same Pythagorean column as the Different, feminine divine activity is pluralised and oriented toward particulars. It is characterised by providential care for individuals and contrasted with the anagogic activity of masculine divinities. Ananke's daughters are more pluralised ver-

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τῆς δημιουργικῆς αἰτίας but when we approach it as the Spindle of Ananke we do so merely ὡς δὲ ἐξημμένος τῶν Μοιρῶν καὶ τῆς Ἀνάγκης.

sions of her role as a principle of order. Moreover, the daughters' activity is directed toward particular souls in their individual specificity. Lachesis, for instance, holds in her lap not only the lots that determine the order in which individual souls will select their lives, but paradigms of the lives of individuals. When each soul has made its choice, each of the daughters ratifies that choice individually, weaving the threads of fate together in such a way as to make the choice irreversible *for that particular soul*.

The pluralised activities and individualised providence exercised by the feminine Fates contrast sharply with the activity of the masculine figure of the Prophet in the myth. Like the Demiurge, the Prophet declares the Laws of Fate to the assembled souls, addressing them collectively from an impartial standpoint.[24] The activity of the Prophet stands to Lachesis in the same way that the partnership of Kronos and Rhea works. Recall the terms in which Proclus describes this creative partnership: καὶ ἡ Ῥέα τῷ Κρόνῳ· πάσης γάρ ἐστι τῆς Κρονίας δυνάμεως κόλπος ἡ θεὸς αὕτη· (*in Ti.* I 47., 1–2)

Like the Prophet, all the powers of Kronos are in the lap (or bosom or somehow interior to) Rhea, but it is Kronos that *articulates* them and brings them to activity. The situation with the Prophet and Lachesis is not exactly parallel, of course. First, as noted, the Prophet stands at a lower ontological level—though Proclus thinks that metaphysical truths can sometimes be presented by "the theologians" through the marriage of inferiors to superior beings.[25] Second, the Fates are the *virgin* daughters of Ananke. But subordinate or not, involving sexual congress or not, it is still the role of the masculine Prophet to announce in full generality to souls considered as a collective class the content of what is in the lap of the goddess Lachesis. What lies in the *kolpos* of the feminine—however one should understand that—must be made explicit or put into action by a masculine figure.

24 It is true that the Prophet is presented as the *servant* of Lachesis from whose lap he takes the lots and the paradigms. Indeed, Proclus locates the Prophet at a subordinate ontological level from the Fate and identifies this rank as angelic. It is also true that the Prophet is pluralised: Proclus supposes that there is a multiplicity of prophets corresponding to the different descents of groups of souls into Becoming (*in R.* II 256, 3–6). Each time a new group of souls goes down into Becoming, a new prophet announces the universal principles that govern such descents. This, according to Proclus, is why Plato writes the words 'a certain prophet' (*R.* 617d2–3 προφήτην οὖν τινα …).

25 Cf. *in Prm.* 775, 21–36 where this is illustrated by the example of Zeus and Demeter.

4 Gilligan and Kant in the Kallipolis

The male and female principles in the Myth of Er seem to manifest some of the features associated with masculinist ethics and a feminist ethics of care respectively. Feminist moral philosophers have long observed that traditional moral theory tends to valorise culturally masculine character traits and action-types, while devaluing those associated with feminine gender identity. Exactly how the contrast is best understood has been a matter of significant scholarly dispute since the publication of Carol Gilligan's book.[26] An ethic of care means different things to different feminist philosophers. Virginia Held has recently identified what she takes to be five common themes running through the diverse ethics of care on offer in the literature.[27]

1. Moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of particular others of whom we take responsibility.
2. In the epistemological process of trying to understand what morality would require, the ethics of care values emotion rather than rejects it, in contrast to the dominant rationalist approach. Further, sympathy, empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness are seen as the kind of emotions that need to be cultivated.
3. Rejects the view that the more abstract the reasoning about a moral problem, the better, since it is more likely to achieve impartiality.
4. Reconceptualization of the traditional boundaries between public and private.
5. Sees persons as essentially relational beings rather than as the self-sufficient, independent individuals of the contractarian tradition.

At least four of these themes seem to be reflected in the gendered providential administration in the Myth of Er, although some are perhaps more obvious than others.

With respect to 1 and 3, consider the manner in which the activities of the feminine principles in the myth are oriented toward particulars and contrasted with the masculine role of announcing impartial rules. The Fates symbolically represent a decline from the universal and impartial perspective of both Ananke and the Demiurge. These "daughters of Ananke" break her transcendent perspective down into more specific and limited perspectives: past, present and future. While the perspective of justice is universal and impartial, care is always care *for* some specific individual. The partiality of care—both

26 Gilligan (1982).
27 Held (2005, 538–541).

in the sense of being concerned with only a *part* of the whole and also as the opposite of *impartiality*—is often conceived as a threat to justice. This threat is resolved in the myth by the masculine figure of the Prophet. He takes the plurality of individual life paradigms from the lap of Lachesis and announces the terms of what is putatively a fair and impartial procedure, through which souls get what's coming to them—one that makes them, and not the universe, responsible for what happens to them.

Theme 5 is glimpsed in the relations among the Fates and Sirens, as well as in their activities. While both the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* and the Prophet in the myth *speak*, the Sirens and Fates *sing*. Theirs is an activity that essentially involves relational responsiveness to one another. This comes across clearly in Proclus' discussion of the higher-order paradigms for the Sirens—the Muses. The basic meaning of the Muses is that they serve as a pluralised source of concord between one thing and another.[28] So the cause is a coordinated plurality (the nine Muses) and the effect is relational (concord between one thing and another). This contrasts with the monadic (and thus masculine?) character of the Leader of the Muses—Apollo. While the Fates are named as individuals and given different functions in the Myth of Er, they operate as a team of coordinated singers and the demarcation between them is no more absolute than the past, present and future which are the content of their song. So, as in theme 5, the Sirens, the Fates and their higher-order paradigms, the Muses, are essentially relational beings and stand in stark contrast to the atomic individuals of the Prophet or the Demiurge.

Theme 2—the moral salience of emotions in contrast to reason—is less obviously a feature of the providential administration of the feminine principles in the myth. The *dramatis personae* are all divine beings and thus exempt from human emotions.[29] What is true, however, is that *if* the various actors in Proclus' reading of the myth *were* inclined to experience sympathy, empathy and other moral emotions, it would be the Fates that seem most likely to be subjects of these feelings. This is with good reason when we consider the particularised work they do in the administration of divine justice.

Consider Lachesis' actions after the assembled souls have chosen their lives. She assigns to each soul a daimon corresponding to the life that soul has selected (620d7–e1). Taking Lachesis' delegation, the daimon then leads the soul under Clotho and to Atropos in order that the soul's fate may be confirmed

28 Cf. *in Cra.* 102, 21–26; 103, 15–20.

29 Indeed, Proclus discussed at length the activities of the Fates (*in R.* II 249, 28–253, 17). These are either cognitive or motive. They are thoroughly rational and initiate change, without being themselves in any way changed.

and made irrevocable. Proclus reads these further steps in terms of astrology: the activities of Clotho and Atropos symbolise the way in which souls come under the influence, first, of the sphere of the fixed stars and, subsequently, under the influence of the planets (*in R.* II 341, 10–344, 18). While the masculine messenger of Lachesis—the Prophet—hammers on the point that the gods bear no blame for what souls will experience in the lives they have chosen, the role of the Fates on Proclus' reading involves more than confirming the choice of lives. It also involves assigning to each soul 'the things allotted to us from the universe' and this is spelled out in astrological terms.[30] Born now, under this particular arrangement of the stars and planets, let us suppose that a soul is fated to die at sea or to lose her daughter to a childhood disease.

Now, it might be that such information is presumed to be present in the *paradeigma* of the life that the soul selects. But it would have to be a very, very observant soul—one well informed about astrology—to realise that choosing this life is tantamount to choosing a watery death or the pain of a lost child. While the messenger, who addresses souls only *en masse* and informs them of the *general* rules of the game, may be confident that the gods bear no responsibility, it would be hard to credit the Fates with a similar confidence if they were capable of feelings of sympathy. The Prophet affirms one of the staples of masculinist moral philosophy: "Your problems are not anyone's fault but your own. You made your choice; now live with it." But the Fates, oriented as they are toward the administration of providence in individual cases, do not seem to have such clean hands. Were they capable of it, they should feel sympathy for the souls whose limited foresight leads them to select lives filled with such circumstances.[31] In fact, Proclus says *almost* exactly this—though he cannot mean by *sympatheia* all that we mean by sympathy. At the point in Essay VII where he asserts that the female Guardians will be given lighter duties due to their more delicate natures, he draws an analogy between them and the operation of female divine principles.

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30 *in R.* II 342, 21–24 Τί οὖν ἀπὸ τῆς Κλωθοῦς παραγίνεται; κυρωθῆναί φησιν ἣν εἱλόμεθα μοῖραν· οὐχὶ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς εἶδος μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἀπονεμόμενα ἡμῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ παντός. ἐκ γὰρ τῆς Λαχέσεως, παρ' ἧς καὶ βίος, τὰ συναμφότερα ἔχομεν· Cf. *in R.* II 264, 9–15. Each soul is free insofar as it has a (limited) range of lives to choose from. But the universe allocates to each incarnated soul certain things that follow from the life that has been chosen.

31 Compare Proclus' own analogy between incarnated souls and the philosopher who takes passage on a ship that experiences a storm (*in R.* II 345, 19–26). While the philosopher knew about storms when he booked his passage, the outside observer who is capable of empathy should feel for him.

> Just as up above [the divinities] differ in the way in which they generate, with the male contributing unity to the things that have been generated, while in a different and divisible manner the female pluralises their common effects, so too the same account applies down here. There is a difference between the female and the male among their similar reproductive activities. And if the female performs this task more laboriously and the male, not merely without labour, but with pleasure, then this too is an image of things among the divine beings. Among them some [sc. the male], through a superabundance of power, are active with much greater ease, since they are liberated and free of concern for the procession of secondary [existents]. Others [sc. the female], however, act, on the one hand, with a lesser degree of transcendent superiority and, on the other, with a greater sympathy for the things that have been engendered.
>
> *in R.* I 246, 8–22)

It would appear that the divine counterparts of female Guardians get *a bit too involved* with the beings under their providential care. Thus, were the Fates capable of emotion, feelings of sympathy for those who have chosen from the lap of Lachesis lives that include astrologically determined misfortunes would be morally relevant.

5 Conclusion

What, then, can we say about the likely activities of female Guardians on the basis of this consideration of their cosmic paradigms? If male and female Guardians may be supposed to resemble the actors in the Myth of Er, then, like their mother Ananke, female Guardians too will be sustainers rather than creators of the city's justice system. Like the Fates, they will implement it *at the level of individuals* and knowing what they know about those individuals they are likely to feel conflicted about the demands of justice—at least on the supposition that their knowledge of the particulars of individual souls generates any kind of identification with their much more partial perspective on things.

As noted above, the Sirens don't *do* much in the myth, apart from echoing the intellectual songs of the Muses in a more enmattered key. To the extent that these enmattered harmonies produce an ordered cosmos, they too are feminine sustainers like Ananke. So, considered in themselves, they are feminine paradigms with analogous implications for female Guardians. Now, the Sirens of the Myth of Er are, of course, entirely benign. But they have sister Sirens who fall under the authority of Poseidon and who have the potential to either ele-

vate souls or drag them down into matter. Given the limited activities of the Sirens, any inference about the corresponding roles for female Guardians in the ideal city must be even more speculative than our previous bits of analogical reasoning. It is very tempting to posit that the fact that Proclus identifies the other, more dangerous Sirens in the cosmic order casts doubt on the reliability of female Guardians in the ideal city. Is it implausible to suppose that these female Guardians will always live under the shadow of the "bad women" who are ranked below them in the other classes—civic counterparts to the bad Sirens under the authority of Poseidon? The daemons in Proclus' cosmic republic have a similarly ambivalent role to that of the *genesiougos* Sirens. But there is no counterpart for the daimons / auxiliaries in the cosmic Guardian class depicted in the myth. The Sirens alone have sisters of dubious reliability in the lower classes.

The political order of the ideal city has the visible cosmos as its paradigm. But that cosmos is the product of a patriarchal order among the divinities that produce it. It would thus come as little surprise if its human imitation is similarly patriarchal.

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CHAPTER 7

Damascius on the Virtue of Women and Their Relation to Men

Jana Schultz

Damascius' *Vita Isidori* is an important source for the study of the Neoplatonic concept of women and femaleness since Damascius portrays here a number of women who played important roles in the milieu of the Neoplatonic schools in Alexandria and Athens. However, his presentation of these women is accompanied by a tension. On the one hand, Damascius praises their virtue and emphasizes the important contribution they made to the prosperity of the Neoplatonic schools. On the other hand, women are described as more entangled with the realm of becoming, and they are not judged solely according to the level of virtue they reached but also according to their ability to be devoted, that is, to adapt themselves to the needs and wishes of their husband or other male relatives.

Since we do not find an explanation or even a discussion of this tension in the remaining fragments of the *Vita Isidori*, my paper will shed light on it by examining Damascius' conception of male and female principles in his metaphysics. Thereby my aim is not to examine the question of whether Damascius was misogynic or sexist, but of whether Damascius' texts advance the subordination of women. I will show that Damascius' metaphysics reveals the ideal male-female relation to be a close and cooperative one, but with a predominance of the male element.

This picture depends on two factors. Firstly, female entities are conceptualized as multiplying while male entities are conceptualized as unifying. The female entities' multiplying activity is essential for the unfolding of reality, but it also makes them potentially dangerous since it tends towards what is inferior. In the sensible world, the tendency towards procession amounts to a tendency towards (bodily) pleasure and irrationality which seems to expose women to a higher risk of becoming vicious. Secondly, Damascius regards female entities in his metaphysics not solely as multiplying, but also as connective. Insofar as female entities account for the constant emanation by acting as a link between cause and effect, they are essentially relations. But establishing this relation between father and offspring (i.e. essence and intellect) requires the female entity to adapt itself to both in order to guarantee continuity.

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The approach of this paper is confronted with two methodological problems. One might ask first whether it is plausible to conclude anything from Damascius' conception of femaleness in the metaphysical realm regarding his conceptualization of actual women. For in principle, it is possible that someone might think altogether differently about metaphysical femaleness than about women.[1] However, for Damascius, the entire sensible world is an image of the intelligible world or, as far as human actions are involved, should be made into such an image.

Secondly, we have only fragments of the *Vita Isidori*, which goes along with a loss of context of many of Damascius' statements on women. Furthermore, we do not know for sure if the statements we have left are representative of Damascius' presentation of women. It is at least possible that the *Vita Isidori* as a whole has provided a more positive or a more negative picture of women than the remaining fragments suggest. Thus, all conclusions about the *Vita Isidori* in this paper have to be read with caution.[2]

1 Women and Their Virtues in the *Vita Isidori*

Considering Damascius' description of the seven levels of virtue in his *Commentary on Plato's Phaedo*,[3] we see that his praise of virtuous women in the

1 An example is Hesiod's *Theogony* (567–594) in which Pandora is totally set apart from the goddesses and the causal chain which connects them. See also Zeitlin (1996, 594).

2 I use Clemens Zintzen's edition of the Greek text while the translation is by Polymnia Athanassiadi. In accordance with Zintzen's organization of the fragments, I will refer to passages from Photius' *Bibliotheca 242* as "Bibliotheca" (Bibl.), and to passages from the *Suda* and from Photius' *Bibliotheca 181* as "Fragmenta" (Frg.). The "*" indicates that it is likely but not entirely sure that a fragment belongs to the *Vita Isidori*.

3 The seven levels of virtue according to Damascius are: the natural (belonging to the body), the ethical (belonging to reason and the non-rational faculties), the political (belonging to reason insofar as it rules over the non-rational faculties), the purifying (belonging to reason insofar as it separates itself from anything external), the contemplative (belonging to reason insofar as it reverses to the intellective intellect), the archetypical (belonging to reason insofar as it participates in the intellect of the first intelligible triad) and the hieratic (belonging to the one in the soul) (*in Phd.* I 138–144). See also Van Riel (2012, 199–200).

In scholarship, there are different opinions regarding the question of what function this scale of virtues has for the composition of the *Vita Isidori*. O'Meara (2006, 87) argues that it is one of Damascius' aims to demonstrate the scale of virtue by means of the biographies of different individuals who have reached different levels of the scale and that this aim has influence on the configuration of the *Vita Isidori*. Hartmann (2016, 223) instead states that Damascius did not align the structure of the *Vita Isidori* on the scale of virtues, while not denying that the scale had influence on Damascius' description of the different individuals.

Vita Isidori focuses in most cases on ethical virtues which bring reason and the non-rational faculties into harmony due to a good upbringing (*in Phd.* I 139, 1–2), and on political virtues which are established through reason's informed rule over the non-rational parts of soul (*in Phd.* I 140, 1–4). He characterizes women especially by the virtues of chastity and moderation, i.e., by reason's rule over appetite.[4] We see this pattern in the case of unmarried women like the philosopher Hypatia (*Isid. Frg.** 102, 7–9),[5] and in the case of married women like Damiane (*Isid. Bibl.* 130, 1–3). Furthermore, women are described in positive terms who use their political virtues not merely for the organization of their own souls but who are active in the public sphere:

> But Hypatia was as such—skilled and dialectical in speech, sensible and political in her actions (ἔν τε τοῖς λόγοις οὖσαν ἐντρεχῆ καὶ διαλεκτικὴν ἔν τε τοῖς ἔργοις ἔμφρονά τε καὶ πολιτικήν)—the entire city was reasonably fond of her and held her in high esteem, while the rulers of the city paid their respects first to her, as indeed was the custom in Athens.
>
> *Isid. Frg.** 104, 11–15, ATHANASSIADI, slightly modified[6]

It is less clear whether some of the women of the *Vita Isidori* are regarded as having reached the higher levels of virtue. To be sure, Damascius ascribes virtues of these levels only to very few of the persons whose lives he outlines.[7] Even Proclus is not reported as having reached the peak of virtue and wisdom since he falls short in comparison to Heraiscus who is described as a model of the union of philosophy and theurgy (*Isid. Bibl.* 107, 15–16).[8]

As a philosopher, Hypatia is the most likely candidate for being able to reach the higher levels of virtue although we find no direct references to these virtues in the remaining fragments of Damascius' report on her. Furthermore, the

4 The association of women with moderation is a common topos in the Platonic tradition which can be found already in Plato's *Laws* (802e8–11) where he argues that—despite the fact that all citizens should strive for the fullness of virtue—moderation belongs more to females and courage more to males.

5 On Hypatia as a model for ethical and political as well as natural virtue see also O'Meara (2006, 78).

6 For a discussion of what this passage reveals regarding Hypatia's political role in Alexandria see Harich-Schwarzbauer (2011, 273–277). An examination of Hypatia's public role is also offered by Watts (2017, 83–87).

7 Damascius' critical—and often even harsh—reports in the *Vita Isidori* have been examined by a number of scholars, e.g. Hartmann (2016, 224–226), and O'Meara (2006, 88). For an early critique of Damascius' role as a judge see Photius *Bibliotheca* 181.126a22–30.

8 Damascius states this ideal in his *Commentary on Plato's Phaedo* (I 172, 3–6). See also Hartmann (2016, 206).

comparison with Isidore shows that—in Damascius' view—she cannot have reached the peak of virtue: "Isidore and Hypatia were very different (πολὺ διαφέρων), not only as man differs from woman, but as a true philosopher differs from a mathematician" (*Isid. Bibl.* 164, 1–2). Rather, the characterization of Hypatia as γεωμετρικῆς—in contrast to the τῷ ὄντι φιλόσοφος—makes it seem unlikely that Damascius regards her as having reached even the contemplative and the archetypical virtues.[9] However, one must consider that it is difficult to estimate the entire meaning of this fragment due to the loss of context. It is not clear if Damascius' critique aims primarily at Hypatia or rather at a pre-Iamblichean version of Neoplatonism which follows Plotinus and Porphyry, and for which Hypatia simply offers an example.[10]

The success of women in the theurgic and divinatory arts—as Anthusa's discovery of divination by clouds (*Isid. Bibl.* 69, 1–17)—seems to indicate that some of the women Damascius describes have reached the level of purifying virtues (and maybe even have ascended to the highest level of the hieratic virtues). The ability of creating a link with the divine depends on the theurgist's or diviner's gift of dissociation from the sensible, thereby becoming similar to god.[11] This is shown best in the fragment of the divinatory skills of an unnamed woman in which the connection of purity and divination is pointed out by the emphasis on the pure state of the water (*Isid. Bibl.* 191, 1–4). However, the way in which Damascius conceptualizes the female body seems to hint at a difficulty which women face when pursuing purifying virtues. For he regards the female body—due to menstruation (*Isid. Frg.** 102, 13–14)—as more deeply entangled with the contamination of becoming than the male body.

At first sight, this does not seem to be an obstacle for the attainment of purifying virtues since they aim at the detachment of soul from body (*in Phd.* I 141, 1–4). One might argue that especially because the purified person dissociates herself from the body, it is not of much concern for her if her body—when menstruating—is more contaminated by generation than a male body. But Damascius' report on Heraiscus demonstrates that the more purified a person

9 For an argumentation along these lines see also O'Meara (2006, 85–86).

10 See Hartmann (2016, 231) who proposes to read this fragment in the context of Damascius' attempt to demonstrate the superiority of the Academy in Athens in comparison to the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria, and Watts (2017, 128) who argues that Damascius—despite calling Hypatia a 'mere mathematician'—accepted Hypatia as a philosopher, for otherwise the surpassing of Hypatia would not be a praiseworthy effort of Isidore. However, the thesis that Hypatia taught Neoplatonism in the tradition of Plotinus and Porphyry is itself doubtful. See Addey's contribution to this volume.

11 Kalogiratou (2014, 46) analyzes how Damascius takes purification to be a "prerequisite" for the connection with the divine and the attainment of real knowledge.

is the more sensitive he or she is to contamination through impure entities. Heraiscus is sensitive to such a degree that he suffers already when he detects a menstruating woman from a distance:[12]

> There was also something in Heraiscus which naturally rejected any defilement connected with nature (μολυσμοὺς τῆς φύσεως ἀναινόμενον). If he ever perceived anywhere the voice of a woman in a state of uncleanness (ἀκαθάρτου) he immediately suffered a headache; and this was a sign that she was menstruating.
>
> *Isid. Frg.* 174, 9–11, ATHANASSIADI, slightly modified; part of this text is also in *Isid. Bibl.* 107, 1–3

This sensitivity regarding contamination which seems to go hand in hand with being in a pure and god-like state does not exclude women from the higher levels of virtue (or, at least, Damascius does not say so), but it seems to make the attainment of purity more difficult and somewhat uncomfortable for women. For Heraiscus can prevent his headaches by avoiding contact with menstruating women. Women, however, cannot flee menstruation.

All in all, we see that Damascius describes women in his *Vita Isidori* as being able to attain virtue, whereby it is not clear if any of the women he characterizes has reached the higher levels of virtue, even if the involvement of women in philosophy, theurgy and divination point in this direction.

Regarding the general ability of women to become virtuous it is striking that Damascius seems to evaluate women not simply by the level of virtue they reached, but also due to their ability to adapt to their husbands (or other male relatives). This is most obvious in the case of Asclepiodotus' wife Damiane who is indeed praised for her virtue (*Isid. Bibl.* 130, 1–3) but who is nevertheless described as an obstacle to her husband's pursuit of higher goods and, most surprisingly, not because she neglects her duty as a wife, but precisely because she intensively cares about her husband:

> He used to say that he was convinced that his bodily life was protracted as a result of his wife's skill. He said this in a spirit not of gratitude, as one might expect, but of disgust at being detained in the body (δυσχεραίνων πρὸς τὴν ἐν σώματι διατριβήν), holding her responsible (εἰς ἐκείνην ἀναφέρων) for postponing death to the extent that any human can do so.
>
> *Isid. Frg.* 229, 1–4, ATHANASSIADI

12 Regarding Heraiscus' fear of contamination, see also Karren (1978, 95–96).

And if not only the adaptation fails, but the wife also lacks in virtue, Damascius does not see much worth in her life whatsoever, especially if she already fulfilled the "function" of childbirth:

> After Isidore married Domna, a son was born to him by her (τίκτεται αὐτῷ παῖς ἐξ αὐτῆς); and he named the child Proclus. Domna died on the fifth day after childbirth, freeing her philosopher from an evil monster and a bitter marriage (κακοῦ θηρίου καὶ πικροῦ συνοικεσίου).
>
> *Isid. Frg*. 339, 1–4, ATHANASSIADI

Surely, the idea that death is preferable to a vicious life is common in the Platonic tradition. But one should notice that Damascius' focus lies on freedom for Isidore (ἐλευθερώσασα τὸν φιλόσοφον) and not on freedom for Domna's soul.[13]

A counter-example seems to be Aedesia, the wife of Hermias, whose care for poor citizens is judged positively although it goes against the economic interests of her sons (*Isid. Frg*.* 124, 5–8). However, that she is held in high esteem ultimately depends on the fact that she arranges for her sons to receive a philosophical education and thereby secures for them their father's real inheritance.[14] Whether she attains philosophical knowledge in this process is not regarded as important.[15] What Damascius emphasizes is her achievement to enable her sons to become philosophers, not her becoming a philosopher herself:

> She took particular care of her sons' education in philosophy, wishing to hand down to them their father's professional skills (τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ἐπιστήμην) as if it were an ancestral inheritance (καθάπερ κλῆρόν τινα

13 As Dominic O'Meara pointed out to me, this fragment must also be considered in the context of hagiography and especially in the context of Damascius' aim to praise Isidore. For since Damascius regards virginity as preferable to marriage, he has to show that Isidore did not enjoy his marriage, but accepted it solely for the purpose of procreation so that Isidore does not appear inferior to Neoplatonists like Proclus and Hypatia who remained unmarried.

14 The important function of family ties in the transmission of knowledge and skills in the pagan circles of late antiquity is emphasized by Karren (1978, 127–132). She shows that although both the priestly office and the role of a philosopher were inherited patrilineally in the circle of Alexandrian Neoplatonists (whereby the father-son relation could be spiritual instead of biological), women could become parts of the chains.

15 Damascius' silence on Aedesia's own skills as a philosopher or, at least, as a student of philosophy is also emphasized by Harich-Schwarzbauer (2011, 243).

> πατρῴας οὐσίας); and she managed to retain for her children the public maintenance given to their father from the time when they were still young until they could become philosophers, which, so far as we know, no other man or women has ever achieved. Indeed the respect and honour paid to Aedesia by everybody was considerable. And when she accompanied her sons to Athens where they studied philosophy, her virtue was admired by the entire chorus of philosophers and not least by their leader Proclus.
>
> *Isid. Frg.** 124, 12–19)

Accordingly, although Aedesia spent the family's fortune on charity to realize her ideal of justice, she fits into the picture of the devoted wife and mother who dedicates her life to enabling her sons to follow in the footsteps of their father.

To sum up, Damascius clearly presents women as being able to live virtuous and holy lives and to contribute to the prosperity of the Neoplatonic schools or the pagan communities in general. However, it is striking that Damascius describes the female body as deeply entangled with generation and therefore as an—at least potential—obstacle to the philosophical and religious life, and that the evaluation of women depends not solely on the level of virtue they reached but also on their "adaptation" to their husbands and other male relatives. To reach a deeper understanding of these aspects of Damascius' description of women, the following section will shed light on Damascius' ideal of the male-female relationship by examining the use of the concepts "male" and "female" in his metaphysics.

2 Male-Female Relations in Damascius' Metaphysics

In his *De Principiis*, Damascius approaches the highest principles by examining a number of paradoxes which arise in metaphysical thinking due to the fact that these principles transcend any discourse. As Dominic O'Meara (2013, 199) points out, Damascius connects this process with the image of the soul suffering in giving birth:

> L'image qui exprime sans doute le mieux chez Damascius l'aspect positif de la condition aporétique de l'âme est celle, bien socratique, de l'âme en gestation, prise dans le travail et les douleurs de l'enfantement. Les difficultés et les contradictions de ses raisonnements sont ainsi des "gestations aporétiques" (ἀπορητικὰς ὠδῖνας). S'exprimant de manière inade-

> quate, l'âme prend appui sur ce que lui est familiar, mieux connu, pour concentrer, élever la conscience à l'intérieur d'elle-même de la présence de l'absolu.

The soul tries to characterize the highest principles by applying its innate concepts, but since this fails, i.e., ends in paradoxes, the soul starts to sense the absolute transcendence of these principles. Thus, that we find the categories 'male' and 'female' applied to the highest principles does not mean that Damascius regards these principles as gendered, but just that these concepts are employed by the soul in its attempt to grasp them. However, the use of the categories 'male' and 'female' in Damascius' description of this attempt helps us to understand how he conceives of the innate concepts of maleness and femaleness. And since Damascius regards the innate concepts as images of the intelligible Forms, we might also get some idea as to how he thinks that maleness and femaleness are established at the level of intellect.

Damascius describes the first principle as the Ineffable, i.e., as an entity about which we cannot say anything whatsoever, neither by means of affirmations nor by means of negations.[16] But he also employs the concept of the One[17] which he grasps in terms of the One-All (ἓν πάντα), the All-One (πάντα ἓν) and the Unified (ἡνωμένον), the so-called henads, since we are unable to comprehend the One in its absolute simplicity.[18] In his description of these henads, Damascius uses the concepts of maleness and femaleness. The One-All which by analogy is also called "limit," "monad," "subsistence" or "aether" (*Pr.* II 10, 3–4) is associated with the male or paternal. The All-One, analogically also called "the Unlimited," "indefinite dyad," "power" or "chaos" (*Pr.* II 10, 10–11), is connoted female or maternal:

16 As Béguin (2013, 562–563) points out, Damascius calls the highest entity in his system not only ἄρρητον but also ἀπόρρητον, emphasizing thereby that it is not just impossible to speak about this entity, but also inappropriate since the term ἀπόρρητον is connected to the idea of a holy or mystic secret. Damascius states in *De Principiis* (II 1, 4–3, 2) that Iamblichus also sets an entirely ineffable entity before the One in his *Chaldic Theology*, a work which is now lost. See also Dillon (1996, 123).

17 As Vlad (2017, 53) argues, the One is also conceptualized as an ineffable entity in Damascius but it is only ineffable according to its nature, whereas insofar as it is the principle and cause of the whole of reality, something can be said about it via its effects. The Ineffable, in contrast, is not conceived as a principle and cause, but as totally transcendent.

18 The henads as consequences of our inability to comprehend the One in its true nature has been widely discussed in scholarship, see for example Combès (1976, 117), Cürsgen (2012, 92), and Rappe (2010, 214).

> For the moment, at least, with regard to the last conclusions established by Iamblichus, we say that we too begin from a unique principle of all things and that after the unique principle we place the two others by analogy with the double row, which splits into two from a unique close unity, without being contradistinguished (ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀντιδιαιρουμένας), but the first does not yet want to proceed from the Ineffable, but it is rather swallowed (καταπινομένην) by it, while the second proceeds already, and it has gotten its specification solely by means of its letting go (αὐτῇ μόνῃ τῇ χαλάσει), for proceeding is consubstantial with it [i.e. with the letting go]. Therefore it has also become for all things the cause of all kinds of distinctions (τοῦ ὁπωσοῦν διακρίνεσθαι), just as the other principle has become the cause of their union in their proper causes (τοῦ συμπεφυκέναι τοῖς οἰκείοις αἰτίοις). And so, each of the two principles is the cause of all things, but the one is the cause of all things being closely united (συμφύεσθαι) with each other according to the horizontal dimension and according to the vertical dimension (and that is why we call it 'One' by allusion), the other is the cause of all things being distinguished in whatever mode or form (τοῦ πανταχῶς διακρίνεσθαι καὶ ὁπωσοῦν). No one should say then that the one of the principles commands one row, and the other commands a different row, but each of them commands both rows, as well as the unified which is before both and formed somehow of both, the one [is active] as a paternal principle, the other as a genuine maternal principle (τὴν μὲν ὡς πατρικήν, τὴν δὲ ὡς ἀτεχνῶς μητρικήν).
>
> *Pr.* II 16, 2–19[19]

As we see in this passage, Damascius connects maleness (paternity) with being a cause of unity and femaleness (maternity) with being a cause of multiplication, differentiation and procession.[20]

The One-All is characterized as a simple oneness which is a cause of unity, not indeed in the sense of unifying a multitude—this applies to the Unified (i.e., to the third henad). Rather, it is conceived as causing a simplicity which transcends any multiplication and unification (*Pr.* I 107, 10–11). The All-One, by contrast, is described as the first and simple many which is the cause of all multiplications, processions and separations arising on lower levels:

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19 The English translation of *De Principiis* is mine, but strongly orientated on the French translation by Joseph Combès.

20 The idea of male metaphysical causes as causes of unification and female metaphysical causes as causes of multiplication is deeply anchored in the Platonic tradition. We find this idea, for example, also in Damascius' predecessor Proclus (*in Ti.* I 220, 4–10).

> For the Unified has an appearance (ἔμφασιν) of the many as well as of the one although these things are not yet discriminated in it. But the principle there [i.e. before the Unified] is pure multiplicity (πολλὰ μόνον), as it is the dyad and the Unlimited itself (ἐστι δυὰς καὶ ἄπειρον καθ' ἑαυτό).
>
> *Pr.* II 32, 25–33, 2

One might wonder how the All-One can be conceptualized as being an aspect of the One if it is regarded as πολλὰ μόνον. For, at first glance, the "simple many" seems to be a contradiction to the One rather than an aspect of it. Here, one must bear in mind that for Damascius we can—paradoxically—only understand the One as the cause and principle of all things if we comprehend it—despite its simplicity—as being all things, so that the many must be integrated in the One in some sense. The causation of secondary beings is not conceptualized as the causation of something entirely new, but as the unfolding of what is already contained in the One in a simple and obscure way (*Pr.* III 35, 21–36, 3).[21] Furthermore, the All-One is not even conceptualized by Damascius as the "all things" which are somehow contained in the One, but as the perpetual process of the unfolding. It is something like the One's generative power (instead of being an infinite number of different things):

> Rather, the many there are a henad infinitively generative (ἑνὰς ἀπειρόγονος), and its first offspring is the intelligible plurality, which has become unified instead of one, and this plurality is also not yet such a determined plurality. For there is not yet any distinction because there is not yet any alterity.
>
> *Pr.* III 61, 22–62, 3

However, the All-One is not solely thought of as the aspect of the One which explains how it is possible that a multitude of entities arises out of the One, but as an intermediary term between the One-All and the Unified it has also a connective function. For since it perpetuates the emanation from the One, or—more precisely speaking—it is this constant stream from cause to effect, it is due to its activity that the effect is established as a distinct entity while it simultaneously makes sure that the effect never entirely departs from its cause:

21 See also Ahbel-Rappe (2010, 380), Cürsgen (2012, 93), and Kalogiratou (2014, 38).

> Indeed, the Unified is such that it has suffered the one (πεπονθὸς τὸ ἕν), while that which is solely one exists above the Unified. However, they have not separated from each other completely; rather the Unified participates in the One. Thus, they have something observed in the middle of their duality, as a bond of the extremes (σύνδεσιν τῶν ἄκρων), by forming this series: the Unified, relation, the One, and above the One there will be a single principle, the Ineffable. But the principles which are called two are the One and the relation which is the power (for power is the first of all relations (πρώτη γὰρ ἡ δύναμις σχέσεων ἁπασῶν)).
>
> *Pr.* II 17, 4–13[22]

All in all, we see that for Damascius our innate concepts regarding maleness and femaleness contain the idea that the male or the paternal is a cause of unity and determination while the female or maternal is generative in the sense that it incites the unfolding of reality (and thereby multiplies and separates). And since the generative activity of the highest entities is perpetual, it is also regarded as connective since it creates a lasting bond between cause and effect.

We can find a similar conceptualization of metaphysical entities as male (paternal) or female (maternal) also at lower metaphysical levels. As Damascius describes the unfolding of reality in his *De Principiis*, the distinctions which are only projected at the highest levels of reality in our attempt to grasp these entities, become actual distinctions at the level of being (i.e. at the level of the Forms), starting at the level of the intelligible intellect where the first actual distinction between Being, Life and Intellect occurs (*Pr.* II 31, 24–32, 6).

However, this does not mean that on lower metaphysical levels male and female entities, for example, gods and goddesses, are conceptualized as opposed principles such as Limit and the Unlimited.[23] Damascius emphasizes instead that male and female entities are mixtures of Limit and the Unlimited where male entities are dominated by Limit and female entities by the Unlimited:

> Not only existents, but even the Gods originate in Limit and Infinitude (οἱ θεοὶ ἐκ πέρατός εἰσι καὶ ἀπειρίας): thus we have male and female, emanative and integrative deities. This does not mean that male deities should

22 For an analysis of power as the first relation see also Trouillard (1972, 354).

23 Van Riel (2002, 216) shows that the fact that Limit and the Unlimited are only analogically applied at the level of the henads does not mean that Damascius rejects the idea of Limit and the Unlimited as contradistinctive principles altogether. But he allocates them (as contradistinctive principles) after—instead of before—the Unified.

> not also participate of infinitude, but that limit is the dominating factor (μᾶλλον ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐπικρατεῖ), and so on.
>
> *in Phlb.* 100, 1–4, WESTERINK[24]

As entities dominated by the Unlimited, the female entities are described—like the All-One—as causes of multiplication and distinction. The female entities in the triadic structures, i.e. power or life, are processes of being multiplied and distinguished and they are thereby responsible for the fact that the offspring (i.e. the third elements of the triadic structures) is less unified than the fathers (i.e. the first elements of the triadic structures). However, just as Damascius conceptualizes the All-One as a binding element between the One and the Unified, the female entities of lower metaphysical levels, too, connect their separating and multiplying function with the function of creating a bond between father and offspring:

> And perhaps one must not oppose identity in such a manner to otherness, as according to different genera. For power accomplishes both, as he [i.e. Proclus] also believes. For the intermediary entity gathers and separates (καὶ συνάγει καὶ διακρίνει). That is why the goddess here is simultaneously collecting (συναγωγὸς) and separating (διακριτική), as also the Oracle says and the poetry of Orpheus.
>
> *in Prm.* II 20, 11–15[25]

One might argue that—since all entities from the level of being onwards are mixtures of Limit and the Unlimited—female entities are only connective because they also partake in Limit. This reading would fit well with Damascius' idea that the connective activity of the female entities is stronger at higher levels of reality (which are generally more dominated by Limit), while at lower levels the separating and multiplying activity prevails (*in Prm.* II 20, 16–27).

However, as we have seen above, the All-One is also conceptualized as binding and relating. Thus, the combination of the functions of multiplying (separating) and binding seems to be rooted in our innate concept of what it means to be limitless and generative. Considering this, the connective activity of the

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24 Here, again, we see a striking similarity to Proclus' determination of male and female metaphysical entities since Proclus also states that male entities are dominated by Limit and female entities by the Unlimited (*Theol. Plat.* IV 91, 21–26).

25 The English translation of Damascius' *In Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria* is mine, but strongly orientated on the French translation by Leendert Gerrit Westerink and Joseph Combès.

female entities does not seem to be something apart from or additional to their multiplying and procession-inciting activity. Instead, the procession instantiated by the female entities or powers has in itself a steady element since it perpetuates the emanation from the cause and thereby establishes a permanent bond between causes and effects.[26] Therefore, without denying that partaking in Limit might very well play a role in the connective activity of the female entities, it seems that at least a part of their connective activity is not due to this partaking, but is an indissoluble part of their multiplying and procession-inciting activity.

All in all, we see that Damascius conceptualization of metaphysical entities is informed by the idea that the male or paternal is the unifying and stable element, while the female or maternal is the source of multiplication, separation and procession whereby it also connects the entities which it multiplies with their origin (i.e. the father) since it perpetuates the procession from the father. For our examination, however, it is especially important to consider how Damascius conceptualizes the relation of these metaphysical entities in terms of dominance and subordination. Regarding this, two aspects are striking.

First, Damascius rejects the view that right beneath the first entity there is a dichotomy of opposed principles, like Limit and the Unlimited in Proclus' metaphysics (*Theol. Plat.* III 36, 20–23):[27]

> But first it is better to ascend from all things integrally towards the unique simplicity of the One which is transcendently simplified (ὑπερηπλωμένην) above all things, and not from a unique contradistinction [i.e. from Limit and the Unlimited], even if all things are in it. For it [i.e. the One] would then contain all things in itself according to the characteristics of two properties alone. But it is universally necessary that simplification take place from all things to the unique cause of all things.
>
> *Pr.* II 29, 10–15

Instead, the expressions 'One-All' and 'All-One' indicate that Damascius regards the first two principles after the Ineffable not as contradicting each other but rather as two aspects of one principle (i.e. the One) or, more precisely, as two concepts which we employ to comprehend the One. Thus, when applied to the

26 For an examination of the element of steadiness in power see also Trouillard (1972, 354–358), who argues that Damascius does not determine power simply as procession but as a mean between remaining and procession.

27 This difference between Proclus and Damascius has been examined in more detail by Van Riel (2002, 209–210).

highest principles, the concepts "male" ("paternal") and "female" ("maternal") do not indicate a dichotomy but rather two perspectives of looking at the same entity.

Second, despite emphasizing that the One-All and the All-One are in fact the One, Damascius indicates a hierarchy between them. The One-All is the first, not just logically in the sense of how we consider multiplicity arises from oneness,[28] but it is also superior due to the All-One's association with procession, i.e. with the descent to what is worse or even to chaos:

> But the second principle participates in the first (μετέχουσα τῆς πρώτης) and then—as it is proper for it—it sends forth the subsistence of the first which is productive of plurality (ἴδιον προὐβάλλετο τὴν ταύτης ὕπαρξιν τὴν πολλοποιόν). Therefore the property of being dyadic has manifested itself in it first, as well as the property of proceeding (for it has proceeded first), and the property of being chaotic (for it is the first which has made room for itself (ἐχώρησε τὴν πρὸ αὐτῆς) and the first which has departed from the One in some way (τοῦ ἑνὸς ἐξέβη ὁπωσοῦν)).
>
> *Pr.* II 33, 12–17

Likewise, at lower metaphysical levels male and female principles must again work together to create the offspring, i.e. the third element of the triad, but while the male entities fulfill the higher function of giving unity and determination, the female entities cause the procession which is coupled with privation:[29]

> What do we mean, then, when we say that all emanation ends in contrariety (προϊόντα ἀποτελευτᾶν εἰς ἐναντίωσιν)? We mean that things proceed towards that which is apparent and not real, that is to say, towards the privation of their own character (εἰς τὰς οἰκείας στερήσεις), which is the opposite of its possession.
>
> *in Phlb.* 33, 1–3, WESTERINK

Furthermore, Damascius emphasizes that the multiplying, female-connoted entities do not only need the unifying, male-connoted entities to limit their processions, but also that their multiplying activity as a whole depends on the

28 For an interpretation of the henads as the logical steps of the emergence of multiplicity see Van Riel (2002, 202).

29 For the connection of procession and privation see also Combès (1976, 118).

monadic cause. There can be oneness without multiplicity, but multiplicity emanates necessarily from a one (be it the One itself or a certain monad). Thus, the whole being of the female causes as processes of multiplication and distinction grounds in the monadic male principles:

> For no plurality is self-sustaining (οὐδὲν γάρ ἐστι πλῆθος αὐτοσύστατον), but it always multiplies around some kind of one, be it a monad, or a whole, or a mixture. So in this way the simple many multiply around the simple one, and the multiplication is the multiplication of the one, just as the division is the division of the whole.
>
> *Pr.* II 209, 14–18

And even if we focus on the connective rather than the separating and multiplying side of the activities of the female entities, we see that this function, too, brings them in a subordinate position. For since the female entities as powers are essential relations (*Pr.* II 17, 4–13), they connect the first and the third term of the triad by adjusting themselves to the male entities (i.e. father and offspring). As Damascius describes it, the female entity cannot simply connect the monad with the triadic offspring by filling the gap between them with her dyadic nature. Rather, since she is the whole process of the effect emanating from the cause, the female entity must manifest herself at the beginning as one (i.e. like the cause), at the end as triple (i.e. like the effect), in between as dyadic, whereby these three manifestations must be understood not as stages in a temporal process but as eternal moments:[30]

> And how will the One be triple? Let us answer that, although it is one, it nevertheless satisfies the triple character of the Unified. Let us admit, indeed, that the Unified is triple according to a certain unified triplicity, as it has been said. But the One turns this triplicity to itself, so that the One has, in accordance with the one, a vague manifestation of the triple in itself. And also the power, as it is dyadic, becomes 'uni-form' (ἑνοειδὴς γίγνεται) in its relation to the One, while in its relation to the Unified it appears at the same time triple (τριπλῆ συμφαντάζεται). That is why the power is the dyad in the middle of the one and the triad.
>
> *Pr.* III 139, 1–8

30 On these three forms or aspects of the manifestation of power see also Trouillard (1972, 359).

Thus, all in all, Damascius describes the relation between male and female entities in his metaphysics as a complementary relationship. Male and female entities need each other.[31] The male entities cannot cause secondary beings without the female causes since the female causes *are* their processions and generative powers. And the female entities cannot exist without emanating from a monadic (male) cause. But the complementary relationship between the male and female metaphysical entities is not a relationship in which male and female entities are on a par, but one in which the male entities predominate. In consequence, Damascius emphasizes that even the goddesses can take on leading positions only if they orientate themselves on the male, be it the male parts in them (for they also partake in Limit) or higher male entities. This is most obvious in the case of Night which is the highest goddess in Damascius' system:[32]

> But the gods teach that they [the Iynges] have also the paternal aspects, as also Orpheus teaches, if indeed the Night alone of all female deities rules (βασιλεύει μόνη θηλείων ἡ Νύξ). And she rules over all genera and that would not be possible if she did not have something masculine in herself (ἀρρενωπὸν εἶχεν καθ' ἑαυτὴν) and if, for this reason, she was not coordinated with the male kings (ταύτῃ συνετάττετο τοῖς ἄρρεσι βασιλεῦσιν). For in no way the female can rule insofar as it is female (οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ ἡγεῖται τὸ θῆλυ ᾗ θῆλυ).
>
> *in Prm.* II 42, 24–43, 4

3 Conclusion

In the second section of this paper we have seen that the women in the *Vita Isidori* are characterized as being able to attain virtue, but that their value is nevertheless diminished by being described as more entangled with the realm of becoming and by being judged not solely according to the level of virtue they reached but also according to their ability to adapt to their husbands. After having examined Damascius' concept of the male-female relationship

31 Terezis (1996, 28–29) describes the one and the many in Damascius as "mutually coincid[ing]" since without the one the many could not "exist at all as concrete entities" while without the many, the one "would appear sterile and isolated from all other existents".

32 For a more detailed examination of Night and her place in Damascius' metaphysics see Brisson (1995, 169).

at the metaphysical level, we should now be able to shed light on these aspects of Damascius' reports on women.

As we have seen, Damascius' metaphysics includes female entities as processes of multiplication and separation which are necessary for the unfolding of reality, but which also tend towards what is lower and must therefore be limited and dominated by male entities. The tendency towards limitless procession can also be found in female entities below the metaphysical realm. In fact, this tendency is even stronger at lower levels since the connective aspect of the female entities gets weaker (*in Prm.* II 20, 16–17). At the level of soul, Limit relates to intellection and the Unlimited to pleasure:[33]

> The object is to show that the second place belongs to intelligence; this can be done by providing that the intellective life is more closely related to the winning life and falls more or less under the same category as the mixed life; this, in turn, will appear if we isolate the principles of each, Limit as that of intelligence, the Unlimited as that of pleasure (τοῦ μὲν νοῦ πέρας, τῆς δὲ ἡδονῆς ἡ ἀπειρία).
>
> *in Phlb.* 97, 1–5, WESTERINK, slightly revised

And since Damascius defines male entities as dominated by Limit and female entities as dominated by the Unlimited (*in Phlb.* 100, 1–4), a soul which focuses on intellection appears as male or 'masculinized,' while a soul focused on pleasure appears as female or 'feminized'. Therefore, Damascius describes the life according to appetite as a female kind of life: "But the life according to appetite is in all ways wasted and corrupted by unbridled wantonness, dominated by base and womanish thoughts (ταπεινὰ καὶ γυναικεῖα φρονοῦσαν)" (*Isid. Frg.* 30a, 15–17, Athanassiadi, slightly modified). And just as the lower and more limitless part of the soul is associated with femaleness, so the female body is regarded as more entangled with becoming and its impurity, especially due to menstruation (*Isid. Frg** 102, 13–14; Frg. 174, 8–11).

However, as Damascius' reports on virtuous women in the *Vita Isidori* show, being female is not an insurmountable obstacle for achieving a virtuous and philosophical kind of life. But to achieve this aim, Damascius seems to regard it as necessary that women are dominated by the male, just as even the goddess Night cannot rule insofar as she is female. And his description of this goddess contains two models for becoming virtuous (or being able to rule) by means

33 The connection between Limit and intellection and between the Unlimited and pleasure is also examined by Terezis (2004, 72–73).

of adapting herself to the male, both of which are also found in Damascius' characterization of virtuous women in the *Vita Isidori*.

First, the *Vita Isidori* includes women who become virtuous and philosophical by directing themselves towards the male elements in their own souls, i.e. towards intellection, just as Damascius states that Night can rule because "she has something masculine in herself" (*in Prm*. II 43, 1–2). An example is Hypatia who dissociates herself from the entanglement with becoming and the pleasures connected with it due to her love for wisdom and due to her permanent virginity. This is best shown in Damascius' anecdote of her rejection of a loving student:

> She remained a virgin, but she was remarkably beautiful and attractive, so that one of her students fell in love with her [...]. She produced a rag of the type used by women, †threw it at him†, and showing him the symbol of the impurity of birth she said: 'This is what you are in love with, young man, and not a thing of beauty.'
>
> *Isid. Frg** 102, 9–17, ATHANASSIADI, slightly modified[34]

Second, the *Vita Isidori* includes women who become virtuous by adapting themselves to their husbands, just as Night is capable of ruling because she has "coordinated herself with the male kings" (*in Prm*. II 43, 2–3). This ideal is best incorporated by Aedesia whose marriage with Hermias is not just praised as happy because the spouses' characters suited each other (*Isid. Frg*.*124, 1–4) but also because Aedesia devotes her whole life to providing her sons with their father's intellectual heritage (*Isid. Frg** 124, 12–19). If the adaptation fails, Damascius holds the wife (but not the husband) in lesser esteem, even if she is not vicious *as such*. This is most obvious in the case of Damiane whose intensive care binds her ill husband to his body (*Isid. Frg*. 229, 1–4).

Thus, Damascius' conception of female principles as having a tendency towards what is inferior—as it is revealed in his employment of the concepts "male" and "female" in his metaphysics—helps to explain why he regards women as needing male guidance and why he judges women due to their ability to adapt themselves to the male, be it the male in their own soul or an actual man. And just as in the case of Night, both ways of becoming virtuous can converge, as it happens in the case of the wife of Theosebius who finally

34 Athanassiadi translates "she produces a rag of the types used by women, stained with blood, and showing him the symbol of the impurity of birth she said [...]" since she reads †αἵματι βεβαμμένον† while Zintzen reads †αὐτοῦ βαλομένην†.

achieves abstinence from sexual intercourse by adapting to the wishes of her husband (*Isid. Bibl.* 59, 1–8; *Frg.* 110, 5–6).

However, it might be a simplification to regard the devotion of the women praised by Damascius simply as a matter of subordination which is necessary due to the female's tendency towards what is lower. For in Damascius' metaphysics, female principles are not simply related to male principles to control their processions, but the female principles *are* the relations (*Pr.* II 17, 4–13). For Damascius, being female *is* essentially to relate.

From this perspective, the adaptation of women to men does not appear primarily as a necessary means to "protect" them from becoming vicious (i.e. entangled with generation), but as a gift which women can offer thanks to their femaleness and with which they contribute to the overall goodness of the cosmos by guaranteeing harmonious relations between its components. Aedesia, for example, might not primarily devote herself first to Hermias and then to her sons because this prevents her from falling into vice, but because in this way she can unfold her "female" talent of connecting and relating, of holding the family together. This reading also fits with Aedesia's commitment to end poverty with which she contributes to the unity of the city (*Isid. Frg.** 124, 2–11).[35]

This perspective offers a way to regard the devotion of Damascius' ideal wives and mothers not merely as a sign or consequence of the inferiority of femaleness, but as a gift of relating which women share with the higher female principles. Nevertheless, from a feministic perspective, this reading is not much preferable, since the so-called "gift" for which women are praised is poisoned by the fact that it leads to social and political suppression.[36]

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35 Poverty as a cause of a city's disunity is already established in Plato's *Republic* (551d5–552d7).

36 To better understand the connection between the idea of devotion as a special female virtue and the suppression of women let us take a short look at the Pythagorean letters which were published under the name of well-known female Pythagorean philosophers and which were probably part of a curriculum for the moral education of girls (Bourland Huizenga, 2013, 46). In *Melissa to Klearet*a we see that according to these letters the virtue of a wife is living in accordance with her husband's orders and not in accordance with the orders of her own reason: "And she should please her own husband by completing his desires, since the wishes of her husband ought to be an unwritten law for the decorous woman, according to which she must live" (18–22, Bourland Huizenga. For the reinforcement of traditional patriarchic role-models by the Pythagorean letters see also Luc Brisson's contribution to this volume). How this idea of devotion as the central female virtue can lead to women being suppressed (instead of being guided by someone superior in virtue) is shown best in *Theano to Nikostrate*. Here, the wife is described as more virtuous than her husband since she is faithful while her husband has an extramarital affair. However, she is not encouraged to take on a guiding role on account of her superior virtue,

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but to follow her husband even in his foolishness: "For the virtue of a married woman is not close surveillance of the husband, but rather companionship. It is companionship to bear his foolish conduct" (7–10, Bourland Huizenga). Thus, devotion as a female virtue threatens to overthrow the principle that the best part should rule in every relationship which protects all members of a given community from oppression through a tyrannical force.

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PART 3

Female Principles in Neoplatonic Metaphysics and Science

CHAPTER 8

Femininity in Porphyry's *On Abstinence*

Miira Tuominen

Introduction

At first sight, Porphyry's *On Abstinence* seems like everything a feminist historian of philosophy finds problematic in the male-dominated tradition. Reason and intellect are emphasized in the formulation of the goal of human life, assimilation to god, extreme austerity towards the body and detachment from it are recommended, and emotions and affections of the body and soul, including even sense-perceptions, are valued negatively. Porphyry's ideal human being is a man of reason—in Genevieve Lloyd's words—an ideal that although claiming that the soul or reason is sexless, tends to assume that the human being having reason or soul is a male.[1] In this kind of framework, the role of the female is determined by absence and exclusion.

However, there is another strand in Porphyry's argument, aiming at protecting bodily life. According to Porphyry, the kind of justice that is needed for maximal assimilation to god[2] requires that one abstain from causing harm to living beings: human beings, non-human animals and even plants to the extent that it is possible (2.12–13; 3.26.9–12) and on the condition that the creatures are harmless to us.[3] Therefore, there seems to be a striking asymmetry in Porphyry's attitude to bodies of different living beings. While the human body constitutes an obstacle to the best life—something that we must constantly strive to distance ourselves from—animal bodies and their bodily lives (if harmless to us) should not be harmed but treated with protection and beneficence (3.26.11=224,13–17 Nauck).[4]

1 Lloyd herself responds to some of her critics in the preface to the second edition of *Man of Reason* (1993²) that her claim is not the one made by other feminists that reason is essentially male and we should introduce another, female, way of reasoning (ibid., xii with reference to some anglophone applications of Irigaray).

2 On the hierarchy of virtue implied by greater and lesser degrees of assimilation and on women's capacity of higher virtue according to Proclus, see O'Meara in this collection.

3 This means that Porphyry allows the restriction of harmful populations, which distinguishes his view from those modern theories that are based on the claim of an intrinsic value of all life; for such theories and their problems, see, e.g., Anderson (2004).

4 I am referring to the lines in Nauck's edition (e.g., 224,13–17). In the translations by Clark and

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I shall argue that although Porphyry seems like a proponent of a symbolically[5] male ideal of life and is severe if not hostile towards the body,[6] he does not develop a theory of femininity as inferior to maleness. Secondly, although it might *prima facie* look like that, his reasons for finding embodiment problematic do not derive from a general dismissal of everything traditionally categorized as symbolically feminine but from the ethical core of his argument. As to the second point, in *On Abstinence*, the problem of embodiment is not or at least not primarily a general suspicion towards everything associated with femininity. Rather, the problem is the precarious ethical position embodiment puts us in. As mortal and bodily creatures we must use living creatures or their products as nourishment, since we cannot feed ourselves on inanimate things. Therefore, we are faced with a dilemma: either we have to stop eating altogether or we need to inflict injury on animate creatures to survive. In *On Abstinence*, Porphyry rejects the first horn and maintains that we are not allowed to starve ourselves to death. It would probably be unjust towards oneself to do so,[7] and such a death could not produce the kind of liberation from the body that philosophers should strive for, since a violent death would bolt soul to the body to an even greater degree (1.38.2=114,19–22; and 2.47.1–2=175,9–18; cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 83d). We cannot thus solve our dilemma by refraining from eating, but we have to engage in some injustice to maintain our existence, since our survival requires that we harm animate creatures. However, in order to live as well as possible, we should aim at minimizing that harm.

As regards Porphyry's view on femininity, my initial hypothesis was that, parallel to his attitude towards different kinds of bodies, animals that one should not harm on the one hand and one's own body almost punished on the other, we find an asymmetry in gender difference as it cuts across different genera of living beings. While goddesses are on a par with gods as divinities and female

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by Bouffartigue, Patillon and Segonds, the lines are unfortunately not indicated, although they mark the pages. This passage, for instance, occurs in section 3.26.11 in the translations. When I refer to such sections, I indicate them with Clark's name, but the same sections numbers are also found in Bouffartigue, Patillon and Segonds.

5 I am talking about symbolic maleness and femininity in order to avoid claiming that rationality is in essence male. See also the reference to Lloyd in note 1 above.

6 Plotinus' approach to the body is arguably much more lenient. For instance, Plotinus compares nature to a mother taking care of her child (*Enn.* IV.4.20,29–36). Although the reference is to nature, the idea could perhaps be extended to our care of the body, as the soul is also said to bring "healings" to the ailments of the body (*Enn.* I.2.5,8). I am grateful to Dominic O'Meara for a discussion.

7 This might be the implication of Porphyry's remark that abstinence is not unjust towards oneself (3.26.13=224,24), despite the diminution of the body. By contrast, starving oneself to death could be an injustice towards oneself.

animals seem no inferior to male animals, in human beings, gender difference is hierarchical. I shall argue, however, that the evidence does not in fact support the hypothesis. While Porphyry is subject to cultural assumptions about masculinity and femininity, his explicit discussion on male and female principles and remarks about human males and females do not amount to a hierarchical theory of gender difference even within the human species.

Insofar as I am concerned with gender difference or sexual difference in this chapter, I mean a rather non-technical claim of there being different individuals of different sex or gender, gods and goddesses, perhaps male and female demi-gods, men and women, and male and female non-human animals. I shall of course not assume that such a two-fold notion of gender would be exhaustive. I also use both 'sex' and 'gender' without implying that anything like a systematic distinction between the two could be found in the treatise. However, the difference between gods and goddesses (and male and female demi-gods) is probably not the same as sexual difference in human beings and other animals. Therefore, I call the former 'gender difference' rather than 'sexual difference', while I use both expressions in the case of human beings.

One might object to my hypothesis about there being no hierarchical gender difference in animals by saying that for a Platonist such a hierarchy is indeed found between male and female human beings (*Timaeus* 42b; 90e–91a) and even extends to non-human animals, pointing to what James Wilberding in his essay in this collection calls "the regrettable reincarnation thesis". If non-human animals have fallen human souls (or souls that are punished of their wrongdoings in their past human lives, e.g., ibid., 91d), animal souls must be subject to a similar sexual difference, regrettably hierarchical at that, as human beings are. However, there is no clear evidence that Porphyry would have accepted transmigration of human souls into non-human animal bodies.[8] Moreover, he does not develop views of the inferiority of female human beings or non-human animals. Rather, as we shall see below in section 2.2, in the realm of non-human animals, the examples of 'virtues'[9] are typically attributed to females, and Porphyry makes a point of finding similar 'virtues' in males.

8 See Smith (1984).

9 I am using 'virtue' in quotation marks to indicate that Porphyry is not necessarily committed to the claim that non-human animals have virtues. Rather, he uses the examples in his arguments against the Stoics. Some animal vices are mentioned too, although Porphyry indicates that in vice human beings are much worse than animals (3.19.3=209,6–11, discussed below in section 2.2). Interestingly an animal vice is male jealousy over females and female jealousy over males, i.e., a vice related to sexual difference. Therefore, if sexual difference affects animal capacity for virtue, the female is superior rather than inferior in such a capacity.

Porphyry also maintains that human women can become philosophers and acquire virtue. In his *Letter to Marcella* that Luc Brisson discusses in this volume, it might seem, however, that this means simply that women can attain the essentially male ideal of a human being. As Lloyd does in her response to some of her critics, however, I want to resist the tendency of affirming irrationality and embodiment *as female* and rather understand the maleness of reason as something that Lloyd characterizes as symbolic and, I would add, culturally transmitted. If we think of a sexless reason, we are conditioned to think of it as male, but we should not take this to mean that it *is* male. Moreover, I would like to push back on the symbolic implications of reason as a male ideal as well. Although the cultural conditioning is there, and the canon of Western philosophy is almost exclusively male, I would argue that we should try to influence the symbolic connotations (i) by stressing examples of female symbolism related to philosophy, such as lady Philosophy in Boethius' *Consolations* and the figure of Diotima in the *Symposium* and perhaps Macrina in Peter Adamson's chapter in this collection, (ii) by discussing women philosophers as Crystal Addey does also in this collection, and, finally, (iii) by stressing female principles at the heart of such philosophers as Proclus and his hierarchical and multi-layered metaphysics (see Danielle Layne's contribution to this collection).

As for Porphyry, he does not explicitly address the question of women philosophers in *On Abstinence*. Sometimes he uses the gender specific ἀνήρ, 'a man', to refer to the ideal philosopher (e.g., 4.18.9=260,16; see also 2.45.2=174,3–4 'divine man'), and in those cases it is best to translate the expressions accordingly. However, he also uses 'human being', ἄνθρωπος, that includes women, as a reference to Aristotle on a pregnant ἄνθρωπος (3.7.3=196,1)[10] neatly shows. Clark sometimes uses 'man' for ἄνθρωπος too,[11] and although 'man' means 'human being' as well, I would resist gendered language referring to men when the reference is not explicitly to a man and use 'human being' instead.

10 See Aristotle, *Historia Animalium* (8.24, 604b29–605a1). While Porphyry talks about 'a human being' (ἄνθρωπος), Aristotle refers to a woman (γυνή).

11 See also 2.61.2=185,7, where Clark translates ἄνθρωπος as 'man', while in 3.13.1–2=202,16–22 she uses both 'man' and 'human being'. See also 1.57.3=132,7 (τὸ εἴσω) which Clark translates as 'the inner man'. In 1.27.1=104,22 Porphyry uses ἄνθρωπος and Clark translates it as 'person'. However, later in the passage, she talks about "the man who is eager to shake off sleep" (1.27.2=105,2–3). While the participle is masculine, one could take it as being governed by the ἄνθρωπος in 1.27.1=104,22 and refer to a person as well. There are several other occurrences of a male participle translated as 'a man' where 'a person' could be used; see, e.g., 2.12.4=142,22–23.

The idea that there is a genus animal to which human beings belong is so pervasive nowadays that it might look like it was always there. However, it is with Aristotle that this idea became standard. Plato also sometimes uses τὸ ζῷον to refer to animals,[12] and of course there were various ways of referring to animals before them: one could talk about birds, fish, four-footed animals, beasts or wild animals and tame animals (often referred to in terms meaning, e.g., 'sheep').[13] However, it is Aristotle who consolidates the assumption that animal is a genus and human being one of its species.

When Porphyry talks about animate or 'ensouled' creatures, as a term it often means animals (e.g., 1.56.1=130,20–21; 3.23.2=217,3). However, I do not think that we can conclude from this that Porphyry would, in the scope of *On Abstinence*, deny that plants have souls as Gillian Clark has suggested.[14] This is because the abstinence from the ensouled (ἡ ἀποχὴ τῶν ἐμψύχων, e.g., 1.3.3=87,4–5) that gives the treatise its name comprises not only animals and human beings but also plants. This does not mean complete abstinence from using plants for nourishment but abstinence (being ἀφεκτικός) as restraint from causing unnecessary harm (being ἀβλαβής) to animate creatures (3.26.9=224,2–6). The highest degree of such restraint that is required for maximal godlikeness that philosophers should strive for includes abstinence from causing harm to plants to the extent that it is possible: using fruit that drop from trees, agricultural products to the generation of which human beings have contributed, and using only parts of an organism while letting the rest live.[15] This means that restraint from causing harm that is central for justice as Porphyry understands it in *On Abstinence* must ideally be extended to living creatures across the board: human beings, non-human animals and plants. With respect to gods, justice as restraint from causing harm is not central because it is impossible to harm the gods. However, piety and reverence (εὐσέβεια, ὁσιότης) towards gods require justice as restraint from harming animate creatures as Porphyry, following Theophrastus, argues (2.12–13=142,1–143,23; 3.1.1–2=186,16–187,2).

12 See, e.g., ζῳοθηρία in *Soph.* 223b coined by Plato that refers to hunting of animals including human beings but excluding gods. Similarly, in *Tim.* 92c2 τὸ ζῷον refers to animals but not to gods.

13 See the essays in Olyan and Rosenblum (2021).

14 Clark (2001, 43).

15 For such use of plants that observes justice to them Porphyry follows the guidelines he quotes from Theophrastus; see 2.13 for the quotation and 3.26.12=224,17–22 for his acceptance of the Theophrastean argument. I am using Theophrastus' name to refer to the quotations by Porphyry that he says are from Theophastus. I shall not address the question of whether or not Porphyry's quotations are genuine. Bouffartigue and Patillon (vol. 2, 18–19) certainly think they are, and they prefer Theophrastus to Porphyry.

Finally, while Aristotle recognizes sexual difference in plants, it is in an important way different from the difference in animals and gods because for Aristotle both sexes generally occur in the same individual plant[16] thus not raising the puzzle he discusses in connection with animals, namely why different individuals are needed to manifest sexual difference (*GA* 2.1, 732a1–12).[17] There is no indication that Porphyry would recognize sexual difference in plants, and I shall focus on gods and goddesses, human beings, and non-human animals.

1 Female Living Beings in Porphyry's Argument

1.1 *Goddesses and Female Animals*

In *On Abstinence*, Porphyry mentions goddesses, women and female animals here and there. Some of the instances are relevant for his overall argument and for the conclusion that justice requires abstinence from injuring, killing and eating animals as well as causing unnecessary harm to plants. Some arguments in book 3 refer to a close relationship between animals and deities[18] of which divine epithets with animal names are an indication.[19] Such a relationship is taken as a sign of a rather high status of animals within the greater scheme of things. Since animals and gods are connected in this way, human beings should include animals in the scope of justice and refrain from inflicting injury on them. Although in arguments of this kind Porphyry does not typically mention which sex the animal is, there is no indication that gods and goddesses would prefer male animals. Rather, there is at least one case in which the animal is explicitly female, namely the goat that nursed Zeus in his youth at Ida

16 Aristotle mentions some exceptions to this (e.g., GA 715b21–25, however, without explaining why such exceptions occur; see Henry ("Aristotle's Development Biology", 263 n. 28).

17 For the history of the discovery of gender difference in plants with individuals of different gender, see Lee and Lincoln Taiz (2017). The question of the individuation of plants is of course a rather difficult one, and perhaps nowadays one would rather consider plant populations. Theophrastus (according to Porphyry) and Porphyry seem to operate on a notion in which, for instance, a tree is individuated by its trunk, a flower by the growth that can be seen above the ground, and so on.

18 For such arguments, see, e.g., 3.5.5=193,3–9: Animals are even better at understanding gods than human beings are, since they bring messages from gods and goddesses (e.g., storks from Hera). Typically, the animals are of undefined sex.

19 See, e.g., 3.17.2: Apollo is connected to dolphins and wolves, for instance. Bouffartigue and Patillon conjecture that Porphyry's source here is an "Academic writing" (vol. 2, 138). See also 4.16.5 for a passage of animal names for deities, e.g., Artemis is called "she-wolf" (254,19–20).

(3.16.5=205,16–18). Therefore, there is no reason to doubt that, according to Porphyry, both male and female animals can have a special connection to gods and goddesses.

Another argument for extending justice to non-human animals that can be seen to ascribe equal status to male and female animals is one according to which animals learn things not only through nature but also through education, e.g., a nightingale teaches her young to sing (3.6.5=194,14–16).[20] The argument[21] aims at showing the claim made earlier in book 3 that animals do not only have some form of rationality (Stoically conceived) but even have seeds for its perfection (3.2.4=188,11–14). The point is that even if animals do not exemplify full virtue—for the Stoics almost no human beings do so either (3.2.2=188,1–4)—this is not an indication that they would not have a capacity for it. Who knows what animals could learn with proper training? Therefore, from the initial total rejection of reason in animals to which Porphyry takes the Stoics to be committed, he arrives at the conclusion that the Stoics should in fact assume that animals can even perfect their reason if correctly educated.

Gods and goddesses as well as male and female human beings and animals also figure in Porphyry's discussion of human sacrifice. Although he notes that human sacrifice had been abolished by his time, some past examples are mentioned of the practice. Quite a few are of human sacrifice to a female deity, although male gods are also mentioned (Ares in 2.55 and Kronos in 2.56). The female examples include Artemis the Best Counsel (2.54),[22] and Hera to whom a human being was sacrificed in Heliopolis in Egypt after the victims had been inspected like calves (2.55). Three individuals (!) are said to have been sacrificed per day, until the practice was abolished by Amosis who ordained the victims to be substituted by wax figurines. Sometimes the examples include a female victim, as is the case in Laodicea in Syria where Porphyry says a girl had been sacrificed to Athena every year (2.56) but had been replaced by a deer by his time.[23] Although the replacement of human beings by animals is an improve-

20 The name of the bird (ἡ ἀηδών) is a feminine in Greek. Therefore, it is hard to tell whether this is a reference to the mother, but at least Porphyry is not adding anything like "this is something animal fathers do".

21 It is a part of a section that Bouffartigue and Patillon (vol. 2, 138) suspect derives from an Academic source. For similarities in Porphyry, Philo and Sextus (*PH* 1.62–77), see the table in Bouffartigue and Patillon (vol. 2, 143).

22 She is called "*la Bonne Conceillère*" in Bouffartigue and Patillon. According to Clark (2000, 160 n. 352) the sacrifice is otherwise unknown, although Artemis and Kronos receive human sacrifice in other myths.

23 Greeks are also said to have killed human beings before going to war; the Athenians, for instance, killed the daughter of Erechtheus in Praxithea (2.56.7), but the offering was per-

ment compared to human sacrifice, Porphyry insists throughout the treatise and especially in book 2 that animal sacrifice is unjust as well. With reference to Theophrastus' account of the early history of humanity (in 2.5–12), he suggests that human sacrifice was a substitute of early offerings (of leaves, grain, flowers, oil and suchlike) that were in accordance with justice. When these became scarce, human beings started to sacrifice amongst themselves (2.27.1=156,1–6), and later the human victim was replaced by an animal (2.27.3 =156,17–20). The argument suggests that while people have understood that human sacrifice is wrong, this has not been understood about animal sacrifice.

The argument about gods or other divinities approving of substituting human victims with animals (see, e.g., 2.54) shows the risks involved in the previously-mentioned claim according to which animals are dear to gods or have a special connection to them. This could be taken to imply that those animals are especially suited to be sacrificed to that deity. However, this is not the conclusion Porphyry draws from the arguments at all. Rather, he quotes Theophrastus to argue to the contrary that animal sacrifice is wrong because it is unjust (depriving a living creature of its life; see 12.3–4=142,13–143,3), and the dearness of animals to gods rather shows why we should not harm them and, therefore, not sacrifice them to gods either.

In the same context, Porphyry recounts a story that seems to contain a reference to a female δαίμων. In the later Christian tradition good or beneficent δαίμονες came to be assimilated to angels,[24] and at least in the medieval philosophical tradition angels were considered sexless (although carrying male names). In the Platonic tradition, δαίμονες were analyzed as demi-gods and assumed to occupy the region between human beings and gods.[25] Sometimes, we find references to explicitly male δαίμονες: Eros in Plato's *Symposium*, for instance, is the son of Abundance (Πόρος) and Lack (Πενία) (203c5). The story that Porphyry relates is one in which in Salamis a human being was sacrificed to Agraulos, the daughter of a human man (Kekrops) and a nymph Agraulis (2.54.3=179,15–18). The point with respect to female demi-gods is that when the rite was abolished by Diphilos, king of Cyprus (2.55), he had to consult the δαίμων (supposedly Agraulos) of whether or not she accepted the replacement of the human victim by an ox. The δαίμων concurred that an ox was of equal

haps made to a male deity (Ares?), or perhaps not to a deity at all. Clark notes (2000, 161 n. 361) that, according to Apollodorus, Erechtheus' daughter died to save the state. This could be taken as a sacrifice in war, although it was not made to a certain deity.

24 A crucial move in this development has been ascribed to Philo of Alexandria (*De gigantibus* 12); see Timotin (2012, 101).

25 As Eros is in Plato's *Symposium*; see Timotin (2012, 37–45).

value, and the human victim was replaced by it. Since Agraulos is female and the daughter of a human man and a nymph (i.e., a deity of a sort), this suggests that Porphyry assumes gender difference to apply to demi-gods as well, not only to divinities proper, human beings, and animals.[26] Again, there is no indication that gender difference would be a hierarchical one in the realm of demi-gods.

There is one complication related to Porphyry's application of gender difference to gods, namely, that it is unclear whether it is compatible with the traditional Pythagorean classification of gods in accordance with odd and even numbers. Athena, for instance, is related to an odd number (7), although in the Pythagorean classification odd numbers are categorized as male and even ones as female. In 2.36, Porphyry refers to this idea and says that:

> … [t]hey [i.e., the Pythagoreans] call one number Athena [7], another Artemis [2], and likewise another Apollo [1]; and again they call one justice [4], another temperance [9], and similarly for geometrical figures.
>
> 2.36.1=165,5–8; tr. CLARK[27]

It is not immediately clear what conclusions we can draw from this. One possibility is that it implies that male principles can be actualized in female deities. In this case, a female deity, Athena, manifests a male principle, number 7. Although this seems like a natural reading of the passage, in his discussion of male and female principles in book 4, Porphyry seems to assume a rather straightforward correspondence between a principle and a gender, i.e., that females exemplify female principles and men male ones. However, as I shall argue in section § 2.1 below, that discussion is rather sketchy, and we should probably not build too much on it. Porphyry himself does not comment on Athena as a male number here, and the point is rather to refer to Pythagorean practices of devoting numbers to gods, a practice that Porphyry welcomes, since it requires no material offering and especially no killing of animals.

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26 There are examples of female δαίμονες in the Greek tradition; See Timotin (2012, e.g., 14; 21; 25) for references. However, the one in the body text is the only explicit reference to a female δαίμων I found in *On Abstinence*. Since δαίμων can also refer to a god, it is not impossible that the reference here is to another deity. Because Agraulos is discussed in the context, I find it likely that the reference is to her and not to another unnamed deity.

27 For the practices, see Addey (2014, 152). For more references to gods/goddesses and numbers, see Photius *Bibliotheca* (codex 187); for the connections between numbers and virtues in Iamblichus and later authors, see O'Meara (1989, 21–22); Brisson (2018, 90). For goddesses and female divine principles in Proclus, see Martijn and Layne in this collection.

1.2 *Virtues and Vices in Female and Male Animals*

Above we saw that one of Porphyry's arguments against the Stoics is that, contrary to their complete denial of animal rationality, they should accept that animals are rational and can even perfect their reason, because they have 'virtues' and 'vices', which both, according to the Stoics, are conditions of reason. The most remarkable aspect of those arguments for the purposes of this collection is Porphyry's references to sexual difference: his examples often refer to activities or characteristics typical of females, and male partners are argued to have a share in them. For instance, "male pigeons take their turn in looking after the eggs and warming them, and are the first to bring food for the chicks" (3.23.4=217,19–218,1; tr. Clark).[28] Storks feed their fathers, which is a sign of their 'virtue'—while hippopotami kill their fathers to be able to mount their mothers, a sign of great vice (217,15–18). Yet another example is a reference to female ring-doves, who show marital chastity of a kind: if they have been seduced by a male other than their partner, they will kill him if they catch him (3.11.1 Clark). A female partridge is argued to manifest self-restraint, since "she refuses to be mounted when she is brooding" (3.23.4=217,19–20; tr. Clark). Finally, in many animals the male is aware of the labor pains or even shares in them as the cocks are claimed to do, and the males also help incubate as is the case with male pigeons (3.10.6=200,16–18). Although animals are argued to exemplify 'vice' as well as 'virtue', both are taken to be signs of them having reason.

Moreover, Porphyry also notes that human vices are way more serious than the animal variants, since human beings "kill their fathers and murder their children" (3.19.3=209,8–11). Porphyry does not of course mean that everyone does this but that some do, referring to the tragedies of Oedipus and Medea. However, it is striking that, as we have just seen, hippopotami also kill their fathers[29]—and do so in order to mount their mothers. Although Oedipus suffers a similar fate, he does so unknowingly. Therefore, it looks like, in this case at least, the animal vice is even more serious. Porphyry does not seem to have noticed the striking parallel; at least he does not comment on it. Perhaps he wants to say that people engage in vicious action with more frequency and in general commit more serious wrongs than animals do.

With respect to sexual intercourse, Porphyry claims, animals also show more restraint than human beings. No artisan would lay foundations of a buil-

28 I use Clark's translations unless otherwise indicated and sometimes in a modified form, which I also indicate.

29 I am most grateful to Jana Schultz for drawing my attention to this parallel.

ding if not sober or in good health, but of human beings "almost everyone procreates when drunk" (3.10.4=200,10–11).[30] However, animals do not do so. Rather:

> … they mate for the sake of offspring, and in most cases, when the male has made the female pregnant, he does not try to mount her and she does not accept him.[31] It is obvious how much unbridled human lust there is in these matters.
>
> 3.10.5=200,11–15; tr. CLARK

While Porphyry probably exaggerates a little with respect to the human tendency to reproduce when drunk, his point is clear. Animals copulate for offspring, while human beings do so for the sake of pleasure as well, or perhaps even primarily so. This, he implies, shows that animals are in fact superior in their 'virtue' with respect to moderation in sexual matters.

From Porphyry's perspective, the arguments about animals caring for their offspring just quoted make it all the more untenable for the Stoics to deny that animals are rational in any sense and thus also incapable of perfecting their virtue. This is because:

> … [t]hey [i.e., the Stoics] posit that affection for offspring is the beginning of society and justice in us, and they see that this affection in animals is great and powerful, but they deny animals a share in justice.
>
> 3.22.7=216,3–6

Therefore, since there are examples of such care in other animals, there is no obstacle to full virtue in animals. The idea is that since human virtue starts from the same kind of care or goodwill (see εὐνοία in the central Stoic passage referred to in note 32 below), animals have everything that is needed in order to acquire virtue. What is remarkable with respect to the topic of this collection, and Porphyry argues for the conclusion with respect to the Stoics, there is no obstacle to female 'virtue' in animals. Rather, the characteristics and activities of the females are in the arguments often taken as models for male 'virtue' as well.[32] The male is said to take part in caring for the young and thus to exemplify

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30 For the superiority of sober procreation, see also Plato, *Laws* 775c.

31 The argument is also known from Plutarch (*Gryllus* 990d) and Philo (*On animals* 48); see Clark (2000, 169 n. 432).

32 The Stoic Musonius Rufus seems to make the opposite move: female virtue (such as courage) is possible, since the behavior of chicken mothers exemplifies great courage that

the beginnings of the process through which the Stoics argued human beings can learn to extend justice to all human beings.[33]

2 Femininity in Principles and Human Beings

2.1 *The Principles*

In the previous section, we have seen that the evidence suggests that Porphyry does not assume the female to be inferior among divine living beings or non-human animals. In this section, I shall consider, first, Porphyry's brief discussion of male and female principles. Secondly, I shall examine the few passages in which Porphyry refers to human women and ask whether they presuppose a hierarchical relation between human women and men. I shall argue that in *On Abstinence* the evidence shows no sign of a systematic theory of a hierarchy between female and male principles on the one hand or human men and women on the other.

Porphyry's discussion of male and female principles occurs in the context in which he argues against eating meat by claiming that it contaminates both our body and our soul (4.20.1–3=262,5–25). The discussion is problematic for several reasons, some of which are relevant for our present concerns. One problem that I shall not consider in detail in this essay is that in the general framework of causes in late ancient Platonism, the soul should not be influenced and thus not contaminated by the body. However, Porphyry clearly maintains that we should not eat meat because it contaminates not only our body but also our soul. I have suggested elsewhere that, according to Porphyry and not unlike Plotinus, the decisive factor in the contamination of the soul by body is the soul's overt attachment to the body.[34] Therefore, in this sense soul is the crucial causal factor even in such contamination.

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is typically a male virtue even in name (ἀνδρεία); see IV "Should Daugthers receive the Same Education as Sons?" 44,28–33 in Lutz (1947; English translation, ibid., p. 45).

33 The name of the process οἰκείωσις is not mentioned here. Rather, Porphyry talks about κοινωνία. For the Stoic οἰκείωσις, see, e.g., Long and Sedley (1987, explained in 351), who translate the term as 'appropriation'; Vogt (2008, 5) talks about 'affiliation' and Annas about 'familiarization' (1993, introduced in 148). Tsouni discusses the process with respect to animals and plants in Antiochus (2019, 184–194). For the central Stoic passage, see Hierocles quoted by Stobaeus (4.27.23,5 ff. Wachsmuth and Hense; Long and Sedley 57G; Meineke's Teubner edition III 134,1–136,2 = 4.84.23). The information about the different page and section numbers in different editions is found in Ramelli and Konstan (2009, lxxxi n. 147). Wachsmuth and Hense's edition is found in the TLG.

34 Tuominen (manuscript).

Porphyry's argument in *On Abstinence* 4.20 is based on the idea of contamination as the mixture of two opposite principles. The claim is that eating meat contaminates us and thus we should abstain. At first sight, one might assume that the relevant mixture of opposites consists in our living bodies being mixed with the dead animals when we eat meat. However, although this form of contamination is admitted as well (4.20.7=263,17–21), it is not the primary case that Porphyry is talking about. Rather, his argument is that if we eat animals, that contaminates us because *the animal* that was living and sentient becomes contaminated when its living body becomes a corpse (i.e., supposedly the principle of life is mixed with that of death) and when it is deprived of sentience (4.20.1=262,9–14). It would of course not help to eat the animal alive because it would die in the process anyway.

Therefore, the case for contamination seems over-determined. On the one hand, the animal is contaminated when its living body gets mixed with being a corpse, i.e., the principle of life is mixed with its opposite, that of death. On the other hand, its sentience is also mixed with the deprivation of sentience, thus causing another mixing of two opposite principles. Finally, it is not only that the animal is contaminated in these ways and thus it contaminates us. We are also subject to the contamination of a mixture of death (in the animal) with life (in us).

One might ask whether all this contamination is necessary in order to make the point. My impression is that in general the section is not very carefully developed. As such, it might be related to Porphyry's general argument strategy that could be described as cumulative. Rather than being concerned about the quality of the arguments, he rather focuses on quantity. His strategy can thus be described as Stoic, according to which the more arguments there are the better, rather than Aristotelian (an argument is only as plausible as its least plausible premise; see *Topics* 8.5, 159b8–12).[35] Therefore, Porphyry might assume that every possible way in which we can take eating meat to involve contamination and be a mixture of opposite principles is worth mentioning, since any one of them might convince some of his readers to abstain from eating meat.

The undeveloped nature of the discussion is also reflected in the passages that deal with the contamination included in sexual relationships. The argument starts from the claim that sexual intercourse contaminates us because it involves a mixture of two opposite principles, the male and the female (4.20.3=262,17–18). Moreover,

35 For such a difference between Stoic and Aristotelian arguments, see Tuominen (2007, 270).

> ... if the seed is retained, it makes a stain on the soul by its association with the body; and if it is not retained, it makes a stain by the dying of the deposited seed.
>
> 4.20.3=262,18–20; tr. CLARK

The latter kind of contamination also applies to intercourse between two males because the seed necessarily dies (4.20.3=262,21 Nauck). However, Porphyry also adds that male-male sex is unnatural (262,20–22)—a point that receives no further argument in the context and is unrelated to his discussion of opposite principles. A further indication of the sketchy character of the discussion is that Porphyry says nothing about same-sex intercourse between females.[36] The point about contamination does not apply there because there is no dying seed, and female purity is defined in terms of not having "taken in herself the exhalation of seed" (4.20.6=263,14–16).[37] Since female-female intercourse does not include taking in an exhalation of seed,[38] it causes no contamination.

The account of female purity in terms of not having taken in an exhalation of seed also deviates from Porphyry's analysis of male purity that is, in the area of sexuality, primarily defined in terms of how well the individual manages to separate himself from the affections of the soul and the body, and purity also functions as protection towards them (2.44–45). Therefore, it differs from the rather untheoretical account of female purity that perhaps just reflects general cultural suppositions. To the extent that women can become philosophers and attain the virtues related to a theoretical or intellectual life, they should also fulfil the same requirements for purity as a virtue, i.e., detachment of the body, its affections and the affections of the soul.

There is one more reason to suspect that the section is not based on careful reflection, namely Porphyry's account of soul and body in embryonic development.[39] In *To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled* Porphyry focuses on arguing that the embryo is like a plant rather than an animal and that the soul only enters the body at the moment of birth when the body has been completely formed—as if a captain would enter a completed ship (*To Gaurus* 10.4 = 47,5 Kalbfleisch) or a musician would start to play an instrument (ibid., 12.1 = 50,5 Kalbfleisch). By contrast, the passage just quoted (*On Abstinence* 4.20.3=262,17–19) suggests that if the male seed is retained in the woman's body after the intercourse, i.e., if the woman becomes pregnant, this leads to a contamina-

36 I am grateful to Giulia Weißmann for raising this question.

37 Clark refers to possible Stoic connotation of such an account of purity (2000, 193 n. 669).

38 There is no reference to a female seed in Porphyry's *To Gaurus*; see Wilberding (2011, 8).

39 I am grateful to James Wilberding for drawing my attention to this point.

tion of the soul by the body. While this is not in direct contradiction with the theory developed in the *To Gaurus*, it makes no use of Porphyry's main embryological argument, namely that the seed and the embryo are not animals but rather like plants.

All in all, I would be inclined to think that Porphyry has devised his account of contamination in *On Abstinence* 4.20 for the purposes of his arguments about eating meat and added some rather hasty remarks with respect to sexuality as well. However, its remarkable aspect is that it in no way suggests that the female principle is inferior to the male one.

Are there, then, other references to principles in *On Abstinence* that would suggest inferiority of the female to the male principles? I have not found other explicit discussion of female principles outside that brief discussion of contamination, except for one that merits a note. This is Porphyry's reference to nature (2.53.2) as a principle that is "of the intellect" (νοερά in 2.53.2=178,23).[40] In the symbolic division of principles into male and female ones that Geneviève Lloyd discusses, nature is certainly on the feminine side. It is noteworthy that Porphyry considers nature to be of intellectual nature.[41] He says that "nature does not shout it aloud in words which can be heard, but, being of the intellect, she initiates by the intellect those who revere her" (2.53.2=178,22–24).

The point that Porphyry is making with reference to nature as personified and possibly symbolically female is that our reverence towards nature—in this context understood as abstinence from sacrificing animals to deities—is like a process of initiation. Initiation of course refers to a ritual context and ritual practices, and in late ancient Platonism, studies in the Aristotelian philosophy of nature were "lesser mysteries," while the greater mysteries required studies in Platonic metaphysics and theology (Marinus, *Life of Proclus* 13,69). It is noteworthy that although nature is, as a principle, subordinated to intellect here, reverence to nature in the sense of abstaining from sacrificing animals is portrayed as a way of practicing the rituals of intellect. In fact, although rituals of nature (in this case abstinence from inflicting injury on animals and plants) are portrayed as initiations, nature is not merely an inferior gateway to intellect. Rather, Porphyry suggests that nature herself "initiates by the intellect" (διὰ νοῦ μυσταγωγεῖ in 2.53.2=178,23–24) those that respect her. Therefore, he implies that there is a way in which nature is working with intellect without stressing that nature is inferior to intellect as a principle. This striking passage would merit a closer scrutiny, which unfortunately is not possible in this context.

40 See also Clark (2000, n. 350 on page 160 ad loc.).

41 'Intellective' is also a common translation for νοερός; see, e.g., Sorabji (ed.) (2006, 74).

As far as I can see, the only explicit reference in *On Abstinence* to the symbolic connection between emotions as female by contrast to reason as male is Porphyry's passing remark in his discussion of contamination. He notes that passions or affections of the soul contaminate us because with them "the inner male becomes feminized" (4.20.3=262,25). This expresses the assumption that the male is superior to the female and associated with reason, while femininity is related to emotions and the body. However, it is important to make clear that my point has not been to argue that Porphyry would be entirely immune to the general assumptions concerning the symbolic connection between femininity and emotion or the body entailing an implicit devaluation of femininity. That would certainly be too much to claim. Rather, my argument concerns Porphyry's explicit discussions of male and female living creatures and principles. The remark about the feminization of the inner male looks exactly like an illustration of the symbolic association between women and emotion. By 'symbolic' I mean that emotions are implicitly and on the level of association connected with women. I think it is important to distinguish such a connection from an explicit, developed theory of the inferiority of women. While Porphyry exemplifies the former tendency, I am arguing that he is not committed to the latter.

2.2 *Human Women*

Porphyry's references to human women in the course of his argument for the conclusion that assimilation to god in human life requires abstinence from inflicting injury on animate creatures to the maximal possible extent, are not unified by one general assumption or even a single viewpoint. As far as I can see, there is nothing specific that Porphyry would like to say about human women in the overall argument of the treatise. However, there are some common themes according to which the references can be divided into the following categories: (i) those that imply that a woman arouses a man's desire, (ii) those that suggest contamination by menstrual blood (2.50 and possibly 4.20.4=263,6: "women staining ivory with purple") or sexual intercourse with a woman (2.50.1=176,24), (iii) those somehow related to human or animal sacrifice (2.9.2=140,2–8; 2.30.1=159,19–20), and (iv) anecdotes in which a woman happens to figure but in which the reference does not seem to have any particular significance. Some of the references in group (iii) could perhaps be placed in this last category as well. However, I initially distinguish between the two, since arguments about sacrifice are central for Porphyry.

With respect to references of type (i), a woman is mentioned as a default object of a man's desire. For instance, in 1.33.6 Porphyry stresses that one should be careful with sensations and/or perceptions because they tend to fuel passions even "when looking at the female" (1.33.6=111,8–9). Similarly, philoso-

phers would not even dream of taking part in "riotous parties with flute-girls" (1.36.3=113,12–14).[42] To the extent that women want to become philosophers, they should not go to such parties either. However, there does not seem to be anything that suggests that the flute-girls are to blame. Rather, the point is that it is wrong to assume that one (by default assumption a man) could indulge in desire and passion (by default towards a woman) without consequences to the ethical quality of life. Porphyry dismisses as mere self-deception the (Gnostic)[43] claim according to which one could have one's attention fully on the intelligible objects, i.e., that one could live an ideal theoretical life, while also engaged in the pleasures of the body, e.g., engaged in intercourse with a mistress (παλλακίς in 1.41.2=116,21–22). An exception to the cases in which the focus is entirely on the self-restraint of the person (by default assumption a male) who should not be looking at women or have emotional or sexual relations to them is Porphyry's reference to Jewish Essenes (quoted from Flavius Josephus)[44] who shun marriage, not because they would want to abolish the institution but because they want to protect themselves from "the wantonness of women" (4.11.4=246, 9).[45] The remark does not amount to a general theory of women as deceptive; neither do the previous ones suggest that women should be reduced to mere objects of desire.

Moving to references of type (ii), in book 2 Porphyry argues that analogously to how there are special purity requirements for priests in different religions who carry out religious ceremonies, we (as philosophers who want to assimilate ourselves to god to the maximal possible extent) should consider our lives in the body in a similar way.[46] As priests (and probably priestesses) should remain pure during their sojourn in the temple as well as during and after the ceremonies, we as philosophers should remain pure throughout our bodily life (2.50). Porphyry asks, rhetorically, if this is how priests act in existing religions:

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42 The passage is from Plato's *Theaetetus* 173c–174a; cf. the flute-player woman who is sent out in Plato's *Symposium* 176e.

43 Clark (2000, 139 n. 152); Bouffartigue and Patillon (vol. 1, 35 and 36–37).

44 *De bello judaico* 2; see Patillon and Segonds (vol. 3, xxx).

45 See Patillon and Segonds (vol. 3, 69 n. 157) for a sentence from Josephus that Porphyry omits here. Josephus mentions the idea that one should not be faithful to a single partner in order not to be deceived oneself. Porphyry omits the explanation, perhaps to create the impression that the motive for avoiding marriage is more dignified (see also Patillon and Segonds, ibid.). For the phrase "wanton ways of women" (ἀσελγείαι γυναικῶν) and its meaning in Josephus, see Chapman and Mason (2008, 85).

46 Porphyry likens our bodily lives to a sojourn at "the temple of the father" (2.46.1=174,27); see Brisson (2018, 89) for *Chaldean Oracles* for the reference to the father as the god above all, Porphyry's description of the supreme deity.

> [S]hall the priest of the father allow himself to become a tomb of dead bodies, full of contamination, when he wants to converse with the greater?
>
> 2.50.1=177,4–7; tr. CLARK

The reference to having intercourse with menstruating women is in this context likened to eating meat and, as we saw above, in accordance with Porphyry's account, the latter is a form of contamination because of a mixture of two opposing principles. It is not immediately evident in what sense Porphyry's analysis of contamination applies to the intercourse with menstruating women. Perhaps menstruation as such could be explained by reference to the mixture of death with life, but since there is no female seed according to Porphyry, this would need to imply that the woman has had intercourse with a man during her cycle and the male seed has died. This, in its turn, would imply that menstruation as such is not a mixture of two opposing principles, and is not such if the women has abstained from intercourse with men during her cycle. Therefore, the contamination of menstruating women does not seem to fit Porphyry's analysis, which is perhaps yet another indication of the underdeveloped nature of his discussion. It needs to be noted, however, that the regulation concerning menstruating women is used as an analogy to the kinds of purity regulations philosophers should follow during their bodily lives, not as a claim to which Porphyry would be explicitly committed.

As regards the references to women in connection with sacrifice (iii), Porphyry also refers to a play by Antiphanes called *The Female Initiate*[47] for the claim that gods enjoy thrifty offerings (2.17.3=147,9–17), a claim that is central for both Porphyry and Theophrastus for various reasons. The core claim is of course that since gods enjoy simple offerings, expressions of piety do not require animal sacrifice. On the contrary, animal sacrifice is precluded by piety as unjust due to depriving animate creatures of their lives (2.12). According to Theophrastus, it would also be socially unjust if gods needed plentiful offerings of animals, since this would entail that poor people or people living in cities are in a worse position with respect to their possibilities of showing piety to those who are wealthy and have livestock (2.14.1=144,1–8). Porphyry himself takes the emphasis away from material offerings altogether and argues that to the divinities properly speaking only immaterial offerings of pure silence[48] and

47 Fr. 164 in Kock (2.78); Clark (2000, 148 n. 248).

48 The instruction is attributed to "a wise man" (2.34.2=163,16) identified as Apollonius of Tyana since antiquity. See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Prep. Ev.* IV.10.7; Bouffartigue and Patillon (vol. 2, 30). For whether or not the attribution is correct, see Addey (2014, 2 n. 9). Timo-

pure intellection are appropriate (2.34.2=163,20–22).[49] Theophrastean modest offerings of barley, wine, flowers, and oil are acceptable, but it should be kept in mind that they can be appropriately offered only to beneficent demi-gods (2.58.2=183,4–7). With respect to femininity, the instruction of thrifty offerings is simply attributed to the play about a female initiate and does not seem to carry any clear implications for our topic.

Finally, let me mention two examples of which the first might be related to Porphyry's arguments about animal sacrifice and the second is a reference to women that is striking as such, although no far-reaching conclusions can be drawn from it. The first case is an otherwise unknown anecdote[50] in which a woman called Klymene (2.9.2=140,2–8) makes the unintentional error of killing a pig. She "did not aim deliberately" but ended up killing the animal anyway. Her husband went to consult the oracle, who accepted the killing, and from then on killing animals has been generally accepted. It might be an accident that, according to the story, the first animal killing was carried out by a woman. In any case, Porphyry does not comment on the anecdote (perhaps quoted from Theophrastus),[51] and it is difficult to know what exactly he would make of it.

The one final reference to women that needs to be mentioned here is in book 4 in which Porphyry lists cases of dietary regulations from other cultures, often of priests whom he understands as philosophers or people who are wise about the gods (θεόσοφος in 4.17.1=256,3; θεοσοφία in 4.9.9=243,18). Porphyry's point is not to claim that all these people and groups are vegetarian but rather to point to case of partial abstinence the sum total of which in his overtly optimistic assessment would amount to total abstinence from eating meat (4.5.5=236,5–6). In the course of his discussion of these case studies, Porphyry refers to Spartan dietary regulations (4.3) through a misleading quotation from Plutarch's *Lycurgus* (8–10 and 12). It is misleading, since Porphyry simply

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tin (2015, 100–103) has a brief discussion of the precedents for Porphyry's silent prayer. He, however, focuses mainly on other works such as Plutarch (*De genio Socratis* 588d–e) and Philo of Alexandria (*De gigantibus* 52). Porphyry's pure silence perhaps resembles Plotinian higher prayers (*Enn.* V.1 [10] 6,11–16) discussed by Rist (1967, 199–212); Timotin (2015, 102).

49 The pure thoughts probably refer to Plotinus's point according to which, although all of intellect's activities or 'thoughts' are pure, some are purer than others (*Enn.* VI.9.3 [9], 33–39). The purest ones are those that concern what is before it (ibid., 35). Since only the One is before intellect, the purest 'thoughts' are intellect's attempts to grasp the One.

50 See Clark (2000, 147 n. 230); the name Klymene is also otherwise unknown (Bouffartigue and Patillon, vol. 2, 79 n. 2), but the anecdote is listed in Parke and Wormell (1956).

51 See the table in Bouffartigue and Patillon (vol. 2, 29).

skips a section on hunting and how the prey was sent to the common meals (Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 12.2). However, he is quoting correctly Plutarch's explanation of allotments: while the Spartans give "seventy bushels of barley for a man," women only get twelve (4.3.1=231,19–20), i.e., only about one sixth of the amount for males. This is remarkable, especially because Spartan women also took part in military training.[52] It has been argued, however, that women did not depend on their own allotments but were provided for by their husbands or some other male relatives.[53] Although the anecdote is simply quoted from Plutarch and Porphyry does not reflect on it at all, it illustrates the social conditions that women faced in Greece and their dependence on male relatives.

3 Conclusion

I find it striking that in his explicit discussions of female and male principles in *On Abstinence*, Porphyry does not argue for the inferiority of the female to the male. This is remarkable because the treatise is, in a sense, an epitome of those qualities that are symbolically associated with a man of reason. Porphyry exemplifies traditional cultural or symbolic assumptions of femininity being related to emotions and affections of the body and soul that surface in the one remark on the feminization of the inner man. However, in his explicit arguments, no theory of femininity as inferior to maleness is developed.

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52 Arrigoni (1985); Pomeroy (2002).

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CHAPTER 9

A Match Made in Heaven: The Metaphysics of Aphrodite in Neoplatonic Thinkers

Marije Martijn

Introduction[1]

Aphrodite—goddess of beauty, goddess of love. Or is she? In the Brill Companion to Aphrodite, Proclus is held responsible (with Hesiod[2]) for the characterization of the goddess as goddess of love—*merely* a goddess of love, that is. "Today," the authors emphasize, there is a better understanding of her "polyvalence, with discrete and overlapping spheres of influence."[3]

As we will see, the flat caricature of Aphrodite as merely a goddess of love does not fit the Neoplatonic image of Aphrodite, which is in fact rather polyvalent. Indeed, it is not at all likely that any ancient philosopher is responsible for the caricature of Aphrodite as a mere goddess of love. Instead, the conflicting stories of the origins of both the goddess (as daughter of Ouranus or Zeus) and her companion Eros (as born from Chaos, Aphrodite or Poros and Penia) led to a wealth of rich and sometimes conflicting interpretations, but at least a plurality of interpretations, even within the work of one philosopher. The clearest challenge for most interpreters is no doubt Plato's split between the uranian and the vulgar Aphrodite. This goes especially, as we will see, for

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2 Cf. Hesiod's *Theogony*, 190–206: "and a white foam spread around them from the immortal flesh, and in it there grew a maiden. First she drew near holy Cythera, and from there, afterwards, she came to sea-girt Cyprus, and came forth an awful and lovely goddess, and grass grew up about her beneath her shapely feet. Her gods and men call Aphrodite, and the foam-born goddess and rich-crowned Cytherea, because she grew amid the foam, and Cytherea because she reached Cythera, and Cyprogenes because she was born in billowy Cyprus, and Philommedes because she sprang from the members. And with her went Eros, and comely Desire followed her at her birth at the first and as she went into the assembly of the gods. This honor she has from the beginning, and this is the portion allotted to her amongst men and undying gods,—the whisperings of maidens and smiles and deceits with sweet delight and love and graciousness." (tr. H.G. Evelyn-White)

3 Smith and Pickup (2010, 21).

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later Neoplatonic philosophers, who did their utmost to find a different place or role in the ranks for every element of the stories about the pagan divinities. In itself, the Platonic split between the two Aphrodites, the uranian and the vulgar one, can be fairly easily incorporated by Neoplatonic thinkers into their metaphysics, as referring to the split between the transcendent and the immanent. Nonetheless, Neoplatonic metaphysics also demands that the two come together somewhere. Hence, as the relation between the transcendent and the immanent becomes more complex, something of the vulgar must still cling also to mighty, transcendent Aphrodite in some way, and vice versa, unless, of course, the vulgarity is somehow taken out of the picture altogether.

The aim of this paper, then, is to display the rich, variegated, sometimes context-dependent, but overall consistent portraits of Aphrodite in Neoplatonic thought, with special attention to the various incorporations of the "split". We will be looking at Plotinus, Hermias, and Proclus, and end with a brief glance forward to Renaissance Platonism. In light of the aim of this paper, we will not delve into the details of Platonic views of Beauty and Love as such. Both traditionally belong to the scope of influence of Aphrodite, but both also play a far broader role in Neoplatonism than she does.[4]

1 Plotinus on Aphrodite, Eros and Beauty

Plotinus' Aphrodite is best known for her identification with soul. As opposed to the distinction and opposition of Soul and Aphrodite, as we find in Apuleius' tale of Eros and Psyche,[5] in Plotinus they are one and the same.[6] Plotinus uses a combination of the famous Pausanias myth and Diotima's story from the *Symposium*: the former for the two Aphrodites, as referring to the two directions which are available to the Soul, or the two phases of its existence—either transcendent and directed at Intellect, or immanent and directed at the corporeal; and the latter for the relation between Aphrodite and Eros as inherently

4 There is a treasure trove of literature on Eros and Beauty in Neoplatonism, but it provides little information on Aphrodite. See, e.g. Roskam (2014), Riggs (2009), and (2010), Dillon (1994), Rist (1964). For Proclus, see § 3.

5 See, e.g., Apuleius *Metamorphoses* IV, 28–29.

6 Note that Plotinus seems to refer to this story at 6.[9] 9, 24–26, although Edwards proposes that he has in mind another story: Δηλοῖ δὲ ὅτι τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ ἔρως ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς ὁ σύμφυτος, καθὸ καὶ συνέζευκται Ἔρως ταῖς Ψυχαῖς καὶ ἐν γραφαῖς καὶ ἐν μύθοις. ("That the Good is there [i.e. in the transcendent realm] is also made clear by the love which is connate with the soul, which is also why Eros is coupled with the souls both in pictures and in stories.") See also Edwards (1992).

connected. This portrait is very clear already in his early treatise (which Porphyry put last in his systematic ordering), 6.9 [9] (on the Good), where Plotinus appeals to the Platonic distinction of two types of Aphrodite in order to describe the soul's natural state of being in love with intellect in contrast to her unnatural state of worldly love:

> For since the soul is other than God but comes from him it is necessarily in love with him, and when it is there it has the heavenly love, but here love becomes vulgar (πάνδημος cf. *Smp*. 181a7); for the soul there is the heavenly Aphrodite, but here becomes the vulgar Aphrodite, a kind of whore. And every soul is Aphrodite; and this is symbolised in the story of the birthday of Aphrodite and Eros who is born with her (ὁ μετ' αὐτῆς γενόμενος, cf. *Smp*. 203b2–c1).[7]

Plotinus continues to elaborate the distinction between heavenly Aphrodite, who loves her father, and worldly Aphrodite, "deceived by the blandishments of her suitors."[8] In the context of the whole treatise, the main motivation for identifying the soul with Aphrodite, it seems, is the emergence of Eros as a natural companion: love or desire is an innate and necessary capacity of all souls, just as, with the birth of Aphrodite, Eros is generated.

Later treatises give us a more optimistic picture of immanent Aphrodite. In the first chapters of 5.8 [31], on intelligible beauty, Aphrodite appears to be no more than the paradigmatic example of a beautiful goddess. More specifically, however,—and this is significant—she is a beautiful goddess that is either visible or is not herself visible but possesses a visible beauty (5.8 [31].2, 10–14). In a quickstep Plotinus here moves from visible beauty to invisible causes of visible beauty. Near the end of the treatise, in chapter 13, we moreover find a very interesting and revealing passage on the relation between Aphrodite and Intellect:

> Soul is certainly beautiful, but he (i.e. Intellect, MM) is more beautiful than soul, because soul has a trace of him and is naturally beautiful by reason of this, but still more beautiful when it looks to that which is above it. If, then, to speak more plainly, the Soul of the All is beautiful, and Aphrodite herself is beautiful, what is Intellect? For if Aphrodite's beauty comes from herself, how great must that higher beauty be? But if it comes

7 Plotinus *Enn*. 6.[9] 9.9, 29–34, tr. Armstrong.
8 Plotinus *Enn*. 6.[9] 9.9, 34–38.

> from another, from whom does Soul have its beauty, that which comes to it from outside and that which belongs to its real nature?[9]

Here we have a more metaphysical restatement of the psychological analysis of *Enn.* 6.9. The well-known argument for supposing that a cause exceeds its effect (or that the superior exceeds the inferior in all respects) is here applied to beauty. If the world soul and Aphrodite, i.e., the Soul, are beautiful, then intellect will *a fortiori* be beautiful. The καί may be taken as epexegetic, "the Soul of the All, *that is* Aphrodite",[10] but I think instead we should read this passage as an ascent from the immanent world soul to the transcendent universal Soul—Aphrodite, which strengthens the argument that, *a fortiori*, the Intellect must be beautiful.

Armstrong ad loc. points out that while in the previous chapters of *Enn.* 5.8 Zeus stood for the Soul, now Aphrodite suddenly takes his place. They are both introduced in this treatise because they are descendents of Kronos (as Armstrong seems to suggest in n. 1), but I would propose that in the treatise, Zeus stands for Soul as immanent in Intellect, whereas Aphrodite stands for Soul as Soul.[11]

The most informative source on Plotinus' Aphrodite supports this reading, namely the late treatise on love, *Enn.* 3.5 [50]. For our purposes an interesting additional element in that treatise is what Plotinus has to say about the relation between Aphrodite and Eros, and between Aphrodite and her father(s). "First then, who is Aphrodite?", Plotinus asks himself in chapter 2: τίς ἡ Ἀφροδιτή; From his answer it is clear that generally speaking, as we saw more implicitly in the earlier passages, Plotinus understands uranian Aphrodite as an hypostasis, namely the universal and transcendent Soul. She is the "motherless" (ἀμήτορα) child of Kronos, springing directly from Intellect, and remaining pure and without any part in matter (which is what the motherlessness stands for) (3.5.2, 18–28). She could also be called the child of the father of Kronos (3.5.2, 33–34): the heavenly Aphrodite is the daughter of heaven as springing from the seed of Ouranos, but also the daughter of Kronos as resulting from his castrat-

9 *Enn.* 5. 8 [31] 13, 12–19 καίτοι καλῆς καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς οὔσης ἀλλ' ἔστι καλλίων καὶ ταύτης, ὅτι ἴχνος αὐτῇ αὐτοῦ, καὶ τούτῳ ἐστὶ καλὴ μὲν τὴν φύσιν, καλλίων δέ, ὅταν ἐκεῖ βλέπῃ. Εἰ οὖν ἡ ψυχὴ ἡ τοῦ παντός, ἵνα γνωριμώτερον λέγωμεν, καὶ ἡ Ἀφροδίτη αὐτὴ καλή, τίς ἐκεῖνος; Εἰ μὲν γὰρ παρ' αὐτῆς, πόσον ἂν εἴη ἐκεῖνο; Εἰ δὲ παρ' ἄλλου, παρὰ τίνος ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ ἐπακτὸν καὶ τὸ συμφυὲς τῇ οὐσίᾳ αὐτῆς κάλλος ἔχει;

10 Cf. Brisson and Pradeau (2006, 111). They propose that Aphrodite here is the lowly goddess (ibid. n. 203).

11 Cf. 3.[50] 5.8, 5–17.

ing his father. Thus far, the relation is one between father and daughter, but the larger metaphysical principle seems to be that of gender hierarchy: "if we rank the male (ἄρρενας) gods on the level of Intellect, and speak of the female (θήλειας) gods as being their souls, … in this way, too, Aphrodite would be the soul of Zeus."[12] In other words, the female gods are natural (and inferior) companions (ibid. 19–20). For Aphrodite, further evidence for this relation is found, according to Plotinus, in the myth of her birth in the garden of Zeus, which he interprets as referring to the relation between intellect and soul,[13] in combination with the identification in some theological sources of Aphrodite and Zeus' consort Hera.[14] Plotinus apparently does not mind that the result is that daughter and wife are identical, probably because he is not aiming at a consistent or unified interpretation of the different myths, but is perfectly happy with using each of them as contributing part of the picture (cf. 3.5.9, 24–29).

The 'aphrodisiac' aspect of Soul is that it is the subject of desire for intelligible beauty. The soul's activity is determined by her nearness to Kronos—a nearness which Plotinus translates as attraction, hence desire—, and this attraction, or rather the resulting active reversion, results in an emanation, the generation of Ἔρως (3.5.2 27–39). The order of emanation is Kronos (or Ouranos or Zeus), Aphrodite, Eros, but as the product of reversion Eros is also the intermediary between Kronos and Aphrodite: "the eye of the desiring which through its power gives to the lover the sight of the object desired" (3.5.2, 40–42) or, as Plotinus rephrases it a bit further down,

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12 Plot. *Enn.* 3.5.8, 17–21. Plotinus does not offer any further justification for or explanation of the general principle in the subclause (if it is a general principle).

13 Plot. *Enn.* 3.5.8, referring to *Smp.* 203b. Plenty (Πόρος) is the λόγος that comes from Intellect (3.5.9, 1–23). See also below.

14 Plot. *Enn.* 3.5.8, 14–23: "[Zeus] will be on the level of Intellect (κατὰ τὸν νοῦν), and Aphrodite, who is his daughter and comes from him and is with him, will be ranked on the level of soul, being called Aphrodite because of the beauty and brightness and innocence and delicacy of soul. And, then, if we rank the male gods on the level of Intellect (κατὰ … τὸν νοῦν), and speak of female souls as being their souls, since each intellect is accompanied by a soul, in this way, too, Aphrodite would be the soul of Zeus; and, again, priests and theologians bear witness to this interpretation, who make Hera and Aphrodite one and the same and call the star of Aphrodite in heaven the star of Hera" (tr. Armstrong). Armstrong refers to [Aristotle] *De Mundo* 392a 27–28, where 'Aristotle' mentions the circle of the 'lightbringing' (phosphorus) star, which "some call Hera and others Aphrodite". Bos (1989, 94–97, esp. 97), suggests that the not uncommon identification of Hera and Aphrodite may in part be inspired by a desire to connect the planets with *Phaedrus* 252c–253c, where Hera is mentioned as one of the gods mortals may accompany. For Proclus' view on the relation between Aphrodite and Hera, see § 3.1.

> from the power which is intensely active about the object of vision, and from a kind of outflow from that object, Love came to be as an eye filled with its vision.
>
> 3.5.3, 11–13

Aphrodite desires Kronos, like someone longing to see, but Love comes to be as her metaphorical eye filled with the image of its object (μετ'εἰδώλου ὅρασις, 13)—a beautiful Platonic metaphor that may remind us of the image of love in the *Phaedrus* (255d–e). One aspect of the relation, then, is that Love is the organ on which Soul depends to fulfill its desire to come full circle. At the same time, however, as the "outflow" shows, the organ depends on the maker:

> Soul is the mother of love (ψυχὴ μήτηρ ἔρωτος), and Aphrodite is soul, and love is the activity of soul reaching out after the good.
>
> 3.5.4,21–23

The love stories may be translated into the nature and beauty of soul, as Plotinus does in 3.5.9: Πόρος is the λόγος of the intelligible world and Intellect (Beauty); drunk, "heavy", Poros is the descent of rational principles into the multiplicity of Soul; Soul is filled with those rational principles (beauties) and is "as a whole Aphrodite"—that is, itself beautiful and also adorned with beauties, i.e., filled with images of beautiful things, presumably forms (ibid. 30–35). Eros, finally, is the upward *activity* (ἐνέργεια) of Aphrodite as combining within herself rationality and lack thereof (ibid. 45–48).

Brisson and Pradeau (127 n. 203) assume that Aphrodite in Plotinus' 5.8 is the lower soul immanent to the cosmos, namely the world soul, whereas Zeus is the transcendent Soul, but this cannot be the complete picture, as I have argued. As Brisson and Pradeau also point out (ibid.), Plotinus in 3.5.2 has the distinction between heavenly and vulgar Aphrodite refer to that between the transcendent Soul and the immanent world soul. In order to make sure that we have both a pure Aphrodite and a living world, a second Aphrodite is needed: that is the world soul (3.5.2, 28–30). Subsequently, the familiar Neoplatonic pattern emerges: if Aphrodite is Soul, then she needs to be present at every level of reality where living beings are found. Plotinus does not go so far as to call each of us Aphrodites, but he does move straight from "this Aphrodite" (i.e., the world soul) to "each individual soul" (3.5.3, 37 ff.): "there are many Aphrodites in the All […] flowing from a universal Aphrodite, many partial ones depending on that universal one" (3.5.4, 18–19). In this late treatise, lower Aphrodite is nothing like the "whore" from 6.9. The type of truly vulgar, downwardly directed desire associated with her does not show up in treatise 3.5 until the bottom

of the chain, in evil men, as accidental (συμβεβηκός) and as passive affections (πάθη) which are due to desires "chaining" Ἔρως (3.5.7).

To sum up, in Plotinus we find a fairly straightforward picture of transcendent Aphrodite as the hypostasis of Soul, with a subsequent chain of lower Aphrodites, but a less straightforward picture of her as being either both transcendent and immanent, or only immanent, as well as an apparent development of Plotinus' view of the second Aphrodite from being vulgar to being the world soul and other lower souls included in the world soul, vulgar love not belonging to her chain properly speaking. Aphrodite's relation to Beauty is in any case that she partakes in it, because she derives from Intellect and thereby receives her proportional rationality from Intellect. Her own beauty consists in beauties, i.e., a multitude of rational principles. Her relation to Love is that she generates it by her activity of striving to return.

2 Hermias/Syrianus on Aphrodite and Eros

In Hermias' commentary on the *Phaedrus*, which presents or is inspired by Syrianus' readings of the dialogue,[15] we also seem to find a *prima facie* simple view of Aphrodite as the goddess inspiring reversion through emanation of Beauty, yet on closer inspection this view may well be more instructive. Hermias starts from the Iamblichean assumption of εἷς σκοπός—the σκοπός of the *Phaedrus* being Beauty, more specifically addressing all types of beauty, from the most lowly to Beauty Itself. The different types of beauty Hermias distinguished as having been treated in the *Phaedrus* are, in ascending ontological order: visible beauty, beauty in speeches (λόγοι), beauty of souls, beauty of the encosmic gods, and the source of beauty.[16] Aphrodite comes in, as we will see, both as one of the encosmic gods possessing her own beauty, like the other gods, and as the goddess specifically of beauty, and hence in a position that differs from that of the other gods.

We must keep in mind, when harvesting views on Aphrodite from Hermias, that they are context-based, and hence determined to a large extent by Aphrodite's place in the *Phaedrus* itself.[17]

15 For a nuanced reflection on whether we can decide on the 'ownership' of the views expressed in the commentary as belonging to Hermias or rather to his teacher Syrianus, see Baltzly and Share (2018, 33–45).

16 *in Phdr*. 11, 24–14,6, esp. 12,17–13,5, cf. 14, 8–12. etc. Cf. Baltzly and Share (2018, 30–31).

17 Also, as O'Brien (2020) remarks, Hermias maintains a certain fluidity in his theotaxonomy, reordering the gods as fits the context.

The two directions of the role of Aphrodite that we saw in Plotinus are also in Hermias. First of all, Aphrodite is the divine overseer or guardian goddess of beauty (ἔφορος θεὸς τοῦ κάλλους) and illuminates all with beauty (τὸ καλόν, 46, 1).[18] Assuming ἔφορος (which Plato instead uses only for Eros) is here semantically reminiscent of the function of the Spartan ephors, her role is then simply that of supervising the established order.[19] In metaphysical terms that role consists in assisting in the emanation of intelligible beauty: "through the agency of Aphrodite an emanation of [...] intelligible beauty has been granted to matter."[20]

In his discussion of the encosmic gods, Hermias uses the Trojan war, and more specifically Plato's reference to Stesichorus' palinode, retracting his criticism of Helen, as a metaphor of emanation. For this purpose, Hermias very loosely interprets *Iliad* 5.451–452 as describing how the Greeks (who, according to Hermias, stand for the rational souls) and Trojans (the immanent forms) fought over an *image* of Helen (herself standing for intelligible beauty), "over which emanation of beauty the Greeks fight as though over a human being."[21] Aphrodite, in this story, is the goddess who imbues the cosmos with (a participation in) intelligible beauty. Perhaps Hermias' thought is that Aphrodite is responsible for Helen being brought to Troy (intelligible beauty inserted into matter), which is not her home.

That's not the end of it, however. The myth also tells us, according to Hermias, that some of the rational souls (i.e. the Greeks), after being attracted by the emanation of beauty, descending into matter (Troy) and fighting immanent forms (Trojans), manage to conquer matter and return home (ἐπάνοδος, 83, 12), i.e., revert to transcendent Beauty (83, 18–20, cf. 140, 5). The second part of Aphrodite's role, in this journey home, we find in Socrates' palinode, where she appears as one of the twelve gods, specifically as the female goddess in

18 45, 34–46, 1 Ἀφροδίτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ ἔφορος θεὸς τοῦ κάλλους καὶ ἐπιλάμπουσα πᾶσι τὸ καλόν. Note that in the *Phaedrus*, ἔφορος is used only of Eros (265c3). References are to Lucarini and Moreschini. Translations for part 1 are from Baltzly and Share, *Hermias: On Plato Phaedrus 227A–245E*, for part 2 are from Baltzly and Share, *Hermias: On Plato Phaedrus 246–257C*, for part 3 are mine.

19 Cf. Neue Pauly *sv ephoroi*.

20 Hermias interprets the mention of Hera at *Phdr*. 230b2 as referring to her role in generating and ordering the beauty of generation (γεννητικῆς καὶ κοσμητικῆς τοῦ κάλλους τῆς δημιουργίας), and indicates that this is the reason Hera received Aphrodite's girdle (at *Iliad* 14, 214) (*in Phdr*. 34, 9–10). He does not explain further, but see § 3.1 for Proclus' view.

21 *in Phdr*. 82.31–83.2 Ἀπόρροια οὖν τούτου τοῦ νοητοῦ κάλλους ἐνδέδοται τῇ ὕλῃ διὰ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης, περὶ ἧς ἀπορροίας κάλλους μάχονται οἱ Ἕλληνες ὡς ἀνθρώπου.

charge of reversion.[22] We could interpret the description of the twelve gods arithmetically, Hermias says, by trying to figure out the relation between each of the twelve numbers and the corresponding gods (and so, e.g., between the number six and Aphrodite), but it is better still to try and understand the gods from their substances, their powers, their causes, their activities and the like (145, 13–17). Aphrodite's task is the "delicious work of marriage" (*in Phdr*. 145, 19–20, quoting *Iliad* 5, 429). This is the power bestowed upon her through λόγοι by "her lowest father" (Zeus in his role of the demiurge), whose instruments are the lower gods. Hermias does not unravel the metaphor of marriage, but, as we will see in the section on Proclus, in Neoplatonic metaphysical contexts (and we may assume Hermias is generally speaking close to Proclus), this marriage stands for the connection of opposites, or of the higher and lower ontological levels.[23]

We find more metaphysical detail on Aphrodite in Hermias' discussion of the followers of Ares (*Phdr*. 252c, *in Phdr*. 197, 25–198, 26). The *Phaedrus* passage describes how followers of Ares behave when they fall in love: aggressively. For Hermias, this passage is reason to introduce Aphrodite as the counterpart of Ares, Ares being the lord of opposition, whereas Aphrodite grants love or friendship (φιλία) and unity (ἕνωσις). Love is generated among the gods in one way, but is not participated in in the same manner down here.[24] Matter changes it, and each of the participants modifies it as well, through its own being.[25] Thus the purity of her love, when emanating into matter, sometimes becomes adultery (which, we may infer, is impure). This notion of the modification through the nature of the recipient replaces, it seems, the distinction between two kinds of Aphrodite.[26] Interestingly, Hermias here points out that the fact that a person is a follower of Zeus or Ares determines the manner in which they *receive* the participation of love that emanates from Aphrodite.[27]

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22 Assuming that Hermias like Proclus takes her to be one of the goddesses in charge of reversion, as is likely in light of *in Phdr*. 140 and 143. Cf. Baltzly and Share (forthcoming, n. at 143.22).

23 In a rather unexpected remark, giving a metaphysical reading of the chariot scene in the *Phaedrus*, Hermias points out that marriage starts with leaving home—i.e., emanation (*in Phdr*. 148,20–23).

24 *in Phdr*. 198, 5–6 ἄλλως γὰρ μεταδίδοται παρὰ τῶν θεῶν [καὶ] ἄλλως μετέχεται παρὰ τῶν μετεχόντων.

25 Hermias presents a beautiful comparison of the different ways in which different materials respond to the heat of the sun: wax melts, but clay dries up, yet the heat is the same in both cases (198, 6–10). This analogy is found in sceptical and atomist contexts as well, cf. Sextus *Adv. Math*. 8 192, Lucr. *dRN* VI 962–965, Vergil *Ecl*. VIII 80.

26 D'Andrès (2010, 153).

27 *in Phdr*. 198, 10–14: διὸ καὶ τῆς φιλίας, οἷον τῆς Ἀφροδίτης, ἄλλως Ἰδομενεὺς μετέλαβεν, ἄλλως

An interesting feature of the treatment of Aphrodite is thus that she stands not only for the counterpart of Ares, as one of the twelve gods, giving her followers a specific character, but also for a quality related not to permanent character, but to a certain state, namely being in love. This double role is also present in the *Phaedrus* itself, but remains implicit there, as Aphrodite is mentioned explicitly only in the context of the madness of love, and not in the context of the twelve Olympians (*Phdr.* 247a). Moreover, it is of course not embedded in the metaphysics of emanation in Plato.

As the establisher of vertical union through love of beauty, and hence as instigator of reversion, Aphrodite also stands for the whole principle underlying the relation between any human and the divine. As Baltzly and Share emphasize in their introduction, beauty in the post-Iamblichean Platonist reading of the *Phaedrus* "is tantamount to divinity" (30).[28] This fits the place beauty has in the *Phaedrus* as one of the main features of the divine (246d), but makes it more difficult to assess Aphrodite's role as that of an individual divinity involved an inspiring love of intelligible beauty in general. That it is true, however, is quite clear, when Hermias states that happiness is to be able to follow one's own god, and then goes on to explain Love as that which inspires imitation of the beauty of "one's proper god" (190, 21).

To better understand this, we need to turn to Hermias' discussion of the relation between Aphrodite, Beauty, and Eros, which gives more depth to this (apparent) tension. Aphrodite and Eros are explicitly mentioned in the *Phaedrus* as linked to erotic mania (*Phdr.* 265b, *in Phdr.* 244, 22–24), which is explained by Hermias all too succinctly:

> Since Aphrodite is of Beauty, and Eros leads up to the beautiful, for this reason Eros is of Aphrodite, and follows her, leading up to perceptible and intelligible beauty. So we call Eros divine mania going from perception[29] of perceptible beauties to the recollection of Beauty Itself.

> Ἐπειδὴ ἡ Ἀφροδίτη τοῦ κάλλους ἔστιν, ὁ δὲ Ἔρως εἰς τὸ καλὸν ἀνάγει, διὰ τοῦτο ὁ Ἔρως τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἔστι καὶ ἕπεται αὐτῇ, ἀνάγων εἰς τὸ κάλλος τὸ αἰσθητὸν

Πάρις καὶ Φαῖδρος, ἄλλως ἦρα Σωκράτης καὶ ἄλλως Λυσίας· ὅθεν, φησίν, οἱ κάτοχοι τοῦ Διὸς σταθεροί εἰσιν οἱ δὲ τοῦ Ἄρεος φονικοὶ καὶ ζηλότυποί εἰσι. I considered the possibility that the latter just means "followers of Zeus are stable, and followers of Ares are aggressive and jealous"—which is also true, but in that case, the sentence makes no sense in the context, which is about qualitative difference through receptive substrate, not through source of emanation.

28 Cf. *in Phdr.* 184, 11–14.

29 Following Moreschini and reading αἰσθήσεως instead of ἀναμνήσεως.

καὶ νοητόν. Λέγομεν οὖν τὸν Ἔρωτα θείαν μανίαν ἐξ αἰσθήσεως τῶν αἰσθητῶν καλῶν εἰς ἀνάμνησιν ἐρχομένην τοῦ αὐτοκάλου.

in Phdr. 233, 2–5

This passage allows for different interpretations, of course. I am interested especially in the purposeful repetition of the genitive: Aphrodite is of beauty, and Eros is of Aphrodite—unfortunately Hermias does not explain further what it means that Aphrodite is *of* beauty, but we do know that Eros' being *of* Aphrodite means that he is inferior to her: he follows her (ἕπεται αὐτῇ). This allows us to see a chain here, with Beauty at the top and Eros at the bottom. At the shallow end, then, the passage merely says that Eros is inferior to Aphrodite, and that both lead from perceptible to intelligible beauty through recollection. There is a tension here, however, between having the same function and being at different ontological levels. So let's add some depth by making the most of lexical and syntactical details. First of all, we can conclude that Aphrodite is the goddess of Beauty (κάλλος), where being the goddess of Beauty, however, means that Beauty itself precedes her (just as Eros is "of Aphrodite", Aphrodite is "of beauty")—she is merely the daughter of intelligible Beauty that 'guards' and passes on the goodies to Eros.[30]

This is not a shocking conclusion, but it does allow us to make better sense of the in this case confusing notion of "being a goddess of F." It is tempting to equate "Being a goddess of F" and "Being identical to F" (in some broad sense of 'identical'), but in Greek, the genitive in such a position is used to express other types of qualifiations,[31] not divine areas of influence. Instead, "Being a goddess of F" refers to a metaphysical relation, of "being inferior to F," but also "belonging to the chain of F".[32]

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30 Beauty itself, Hermias states, is analogous to light, i.e. a medium between us and the divine realm, which joins and unites. *in Phdr.* 188, 13–14 τὸ κάλλος συνδετικόν ἐστι καὶ ἑνωτικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς ἀναγωγὴν τῶν νοητῶν, ad *Phdr.* 250d. The details of the analogy are not entirely clear, as Baltzly and Share point out: the light of the Sun unites sight with the object of sight, and beauty unites the soul—whether transitively or not, the Greek text does not clearly show. Either beauty renders the soul a unity in itself, allowing its ascent to the intelligible, or beauty ties the soul to the ascent to the intelligible. Either way, the text does not really fit. It may be corrupt. The content we would wish to see here, in light of the analogy with light, is rather that beauty (light) unites the soul (sight) with a beautiful thing or person (object of sight), thereby instigating the ascent to the intelligible (Sun). For an analogy between the Sun and Aphrodite, see Van den Berg (2000, 163).

31 For examples, see Parker (2017).

32 Cf. Proclus' expression "of another" at *ET* 44 and *in Tim.* I 11, 1.

Second, one could divide the labour expressed in ἀνάγων εἰς τὸ κάλλος τὸ αἰσθητὸν καὶ νοητόν ("leading up to perceptible and intelligible beauty") between Eros and Aphrodite, by adding the different ontological levels: Eros inspires the first step, attraction to perceptible beauty, and Aphrodite the next, recollection of intelligible beauty. The text does not really provide evidence for this reading, but if we turn to *in Phdr*. 188, 5–9, we find Hermias distinguishing between philosophers who have ascended from immanent forms (εἰδῶν) to intelligibles (νοητά), and lovers, ascending through beauty to ἐκεινά—which, considering the distance expressed by ἐκεινά, I take to refer to the immanent forms.[33]

The picture emerging, then, is that of Eros leading from perceptible beauties to the forms, and Aphrodite leading from forms to intelligibles. It must be said, however, that on more than one occasion Hermias leaves out Aphrodite when discussing erotic mania and instead calls Eros its ἔφορος.[34] And finally, in Hermias we find no vulgar Aphrodite, which may simply be due to the fact that she does not occur in the *Phaedrus* either. We do, of course, find plenty of references to licentious love, and even once to Pausanias' division of love into two kinds (36, 4), but never associated with Aphrodite.[35] And Hermias' explanation of 'daemonically' (*Phdr*. 234d1) as referring to the first ontological level at which we find both good and bad, including licentious desire under the bad, suggests that he relegates vulgarity to the level of lower Eros.[36]

3 Proclus

Now let us turn to Proclus. As opposed to Plotinus, and closer to Hermias, Proclus thinks of Aphrodite, not as a hypostasis, but as both the origin of the metaphysical chain and several of its lower levels—the chain, that is, that provides the power or capacity of bringing opposites together. Moreover, the chain knows two directions (which do echo what we saw in Plotinus), which are mapped onto and replace the distinction between heavenly and pandemic Aphrodite (as opposed to what we saw in Plotinus):[37] on the one hand, heav-

33 *in Phdr*. 188, 5–9 Τί οὖν; οἱ φιλόσοφοι οὐ περὶ ἐκεῖνα μᾶλλον ἐπτόηνται, λέγω δὴ φρόνησιν, δικαιοσύνην καὶ τὰ ὅμοια; ἀλλὰ λέγομεν ὅτι νῦν οὐ περὶ τῶν φιλοσόφων τῶν ἤδη ἀναχθέντων ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐπὶ τὰ νοητὰ λέγει, ἀλλὰ περὶ τοῦ ἐρωτικοῦ τοῦ διὰ τοῦ κάλλους ἐπ' ἐκεῖνα· ἔστι δὲ τὸ ἐρωτικὸν πλάτος πολύ.

34 E.g. *in Phdr*. 4, 27–30, and practically identical text at 173, 10–11.

35 E.g. *in Phdr*. 35–36.

36 *in Phdr*. 42, 13–21.

37 Van den Berg (2000, 246).

enly Aphrodite is a power of inciting love of divine Beauty and Intellect—and as such related to reversion—and called a cause of love. On the other hand, 'lower' Aphrodite is her emanative aspect, as a creative force that is associated with the physical world. In this context, she is called a cause of beauty—albeit not, of course, of primary Beauty.[38] Scholars tend to emphasize Aphrodite's role in the triad of elevating gods in the hypercosmic-encosmic realm, probably because this is the one more emphatically discussed in the *Platonic Theology*.[39] In excellent inventories and analyses of Proclian material on Aphrodite and Eros, however, Lankila and D'Andrès show that it makes sense to distinguish in Proclus' work a demonic level of Aphrodite, an encosmic one, a hypercosmic-encosmic one, and a hypercosmic one.[40]

Although he does not say so in so many words, it is quite probable that Proclus, like Damascius, envisions the standard double chain of emanation also with respect to Aphrodite.[41] On the one hand, she is part of a chain of sameness, containing a first Aphrodite and lower Aphrodites; on the other hand, she is part of a chain of difference, beginning with transcendent Beauty, finding Aphrodite along the way, and ending in Eros (or even, but somewhat trivially, a chain of unity, beginning with the One).[42] In this chain, Aphrodite would be analogous to the Unlimited (but, as we will see in § 3.2, not as opposed to Limit).

In the following, we will look at some of the levels of the chain of Aphrodite on the basis of passages from the 5th and 6th essays on the *Republic*, parts of the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, chapters in books I and VI of the *Platonic Theology*, *Hymns* II and V to Aphrodite, and one chapter in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*. Proclus' elaboration of the details of the different manifestations and powers of Aphrodite makes use of the entire storage of mythology about the goddess, as well as astronomical background.

Interestingly, as Anne Sheppard points out, Aphrodite hardly figures in the *ars amatoria* of Proclus, the *Commentary on the Alcibiades*.[43] We do find the

38 For Proclus' notion of primary Beauty (often called καλλονή) and the coordinate series, see *Theol. Plat.* I 24, III 11, III 22, and Sheppard (2017, 284–285). See also n. 66.

39 Cf. Lankila (2009, 25).

40 Lankila (2009, 26–40); D'Andrès (2010).

41 Damascius *Pr.* I 46,9–47,16 (Westerink) uses Aphrodite and Eros (like Zeus and Athena) to illustrate the two directions of emanation: of likeness, i.e. Aphrodite's emanating from the first Aphrodite, and of unlikeness, Eros emanating from Aphrodite. For the metaphysical principle of double emanation, see also Martijn and Gerson (2017), "Proclus' System." In Proclus' *Hymn* II, the lower links of the chain are referred to as Erotes. See Van den Berg (2000, 190 ff.).

42 Note, however, that the first Eros originates at a higher ontological level than the first Aphrodite. On this topic see D'Andrès (2010, 214–217), and Hoffmann (2000).

43 Sheppard (2017). Aphrodite is mentioned in this commentary only as an example of off-

same metaphysics of Beauty and reversion there, it seems, but with Eros and Beauty as the only parties involved.[44] The reason Aphrodite is missing from *In Alc.*, besides the fact that the *Alcibiades* itself does not speak of her, may be, as D'Andrès suggests, that the true erotic love is portrayed as manly (ἀρρενωπὸν) by Proclus. I agree as long as this point is related to the specific needs of this particular dialogue: the reduction of the chain of love to masculine figures only fits the male protagonists of the dialogue and hence facilitates turning Socrates into the intermediary between Alcibiades and divine Beauty.[45]

3.1 *Two Aphrodites*

In his etymology of Aphrodite in the *Cratylus commentary* (xlcccciii), Proclus discusses the two Aphrodites we know from *Symposium* 180d: one, he says, born from Uranus, at the hands of Cronus, and one from Zeus, assisted by Dione.[46] The 'metaphysizing' explanation Proclus provides of especially the second Aphrodite is a far cry from the vulgar love we find in Plato. The two Aphrodites, says Proclus, are unified in their shared substantial nature (ὑποστάσις), which is due to the generative powers both their progenitors bestow, but they differ in their causes, ontological position, and powers (κατά τε τὰ αἴτια καὶ κατὰ τὰς τάξεις καὶ κατὰ τὰς δυνάμεις).[47] The ontological position of heavenly Aphrodite, as the daughter of a god, is of course superior to that of the second Aphrodite, who is born from his offspring and a lower goddess. The first is hypercosmic, a guide to intelligible Beauty and conductor of immaculate life, and she separates from generation. She "binds together different kinds with one desire for beauty".[48] The second is both hypercosmic and encosmic, as she "manages all the pairs in Uranian cosmos and earth and ties them to one another, and completes their productive emanations through harmonious

spring loved by their parents (*in Alc.* 55) and in relation to the stages of our life, as characteristic for the third age, that of puberty: "the third age in the creativity of Aphrodite, when they begin to produce semen and to arouse the child-producing faculties of nature" (*in Alc.* 196).

44 Cf. the parallels signalled between *Hymn* 11 and *in Alc.* in Van den Berg (2000, 195–197).

45 *in Alc.* 25, 24–25, see also D'Andrès (2010, 94). As Pirenne-Delforge (1994, ch. 2.1.4.2) points out, and as we all know from the *Symposium*, Aphrodite also figures in the context of homosexual relations.

46 On this passage, see also Van den Berg (2000, 191): "As we have seen, Aphrodite's unintentional father, Uranus is 'the connector', the source of all cohesion. Aphrodite is thus interpreted as a cohesive force emanating from Uranus: she binds all things together by a universally shared desire for Beauty."

47 *in Cra.* clxxxiii, 111, 6–20.

48 Cf. Van den Berg (2008, 189–191). The 'kinds' could be many things that are differentiated in the cosmos and find one another in reversion (opposing elements, different sexes, etc.).

union".[49] In general, Aphrodite is the force which brings together hierarchically ordered opposites through *philia*, siding with the inferior and bringing it in agreement with higher levels of reality.[50] She 'weds' opposites in emanation and in reversion, horizontally in emanation (opposites at the same ontological level, but always understood as hierarchically ordered) and vertically in reversion (the same properties or entities, but at different ontological levels), thereby creating encosmic harmony based in the hypercosmic.[51] In this, she resembles Hera, although Proclus' view of their resemblance differs from that of Plotinus and Syrianus: he is less interested in Aphrodite supporting Hera, than in her reverting to Zeus.[52]

In sum, these two levels of Aphrodite, which are in fact the main levels of her activity, are concerned with unifying, in emanation as in reversion. Interestingly, *Hymn* 11 addresses Aphrodite as having a presence and activity at these same levels, but this time with what seems a polemic undertone: "whether you envelop the great heaven all around, where, as they say, you are the divine soul of the everlasting cosmos, or dwell in the aether above the rims of the seven orbits while pouring unyielding powers forward into your series" (15–18). Two options are here presented, but their characterizations are only apparently on equal footing. The latter, which seems to refer to hypercosmic Aphrodite ("beyond the seven orbits") as the monad of her series, fits Proclus' preference.[53] The characterization of the former as World Soul is, as van den Berg

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49 *in Cra.* clxxxiii, 111,9–12, ἡ δὲ Διωναία ἐπιτροπεύει πάσας τὰς ἐν τῷ Οὐρανίῳ κόσμῳ καὶ γῇ συστοιχίας καὶ συνδεῖ πρὸς ἀλλήλας, καὶ τελειοῖ τὰς γεννητικὰς αὐτῶν προόδους διὰ τῆς ὁμονοητικῆς συζεύξεως. I find at least two things puzzling in this passage. Why does Dionian Aphrodite administer the pairs of the *Uranian or heavenly cosmos*, rather than the Demiurgic? And why: "and earth"? A sloppy, yet not unlikely interpretation would be that she takes the paradigmatic cosmos (the Living Being of the *Timaeus*) and pairs the opposites therein in their emanation into the physical cosmos. Note that the description is very similar to that of Rheia at *Theol. Plat.* v 38, 1–9.

50 *in R.* I 95, 16–26 ἐπεὶ δὲ πάσας ἀνάγκη τὰς ἐναντιώσεις εἰς τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλας ὁμολογίαν τελευτᾶν, πάρεστι καὶ ἡ Ἀφροδίτη, καθάπερ εἴπομεν, φιλίαν ἐμποιοῦσα τοῖς ἀντικειμένοις, συμμαχοῦσα δὲ ὅμως τοῖς χείροσιν, διότι καὶ ταῦτα μάλιστα κοσμεῖται σύμμετρα καὶ προσήγορα γινόμενα τοῖς ἀμείνοσι τῶν ἐναντίων. Cf. Van den Berg (2000, 162).

51 For Aphrodite as goddess of harmony and concord, and as bringing forth Harmony with Ares, see *The New Pauly* sv 'Aphrodite'. For the double role see also *in R.* I 139, 3–6, cf. Lankila (2009, 37) for Proclus' interpretation of Aphrodite lending her girdle to Hera in *Iliad* 14, 188–223.

52 And the support seems no more than a metaphysically more elevated presence of (a source of) Aphrodite, *in R.* I 138, 31–139,5. Cf. Sheppard (1980, 71–72) and Baltzly, Miles, and Finamore (2018, n. 272).

53 Cf. Van den Berg (2000, 205).

points out, presented with a slight distance: "as they say"[54]—and this happens to be Plotinus' view. It is a view Proclus does not share. We'll briefly return to this later.

3.2 *Aphrodite as Female Cause*

In the *Platonic Theology*, the births of Aphrodite and Eros, as described in the *Symposium*, are discussed as part of the more general argument for the Gods' being unborn (τὸ ἀγέννητον), as an example of symbolic expressions of ontological dependence.[55] In this chapter, Proclus also discusses the difference between primary, intermediate, and ultimate divinities, and more specifically, the question of the difference between male and female causes: Plato, in the *Timaeus*, invokes the gods and goddesses, and further on distinguishes between a paternal cause and a maternal one.[56] He is not here concerned with Aphrodite, or any specific god/goddess as such, but with what we may call a chicken-or-egg question: in general, in any product that which is superior and unitary is caused by the paternal cause, that which is inferior and more particular is caused by the maternal cause. The father is analogous to the monad and to πέρας, the mother to the dyad and to the ἄπειρον, which has the power to generate beings. However, while the paternal is always uniform and superior to its offspring, thereby also forming the natural focus of ἐπιστροφή, the maternal has two shapes (perhaps fitting its dyadic nature), sometimes being superior, sometimes being inferior in essence. Examples of the latter are Penia as mother of Eros (*Symposium*) and matter as mother of everything (*Timaeus*).[57] The superior maternal causes are generative and perfective δυνάμεις of secondary beings, suppliers of their lives and distinctions. They are superior to their offspring, but inferior to the father.[58] The inferior maternal causes, says Proclus, are "the δυνάμεις which receive the emanating beings, multiply their ἐνεργεῖαι, and extend the lowest part of their products."[59] In the latter case, the offspring connects paternal and maternal cause; in the former case, the offspring resembles either its paternal aspect (and is creative, protective, or containing—all properties related to Limit) or its maternal aspect (and is fertile, vivifying,

54 For this passage see the commentary in Van den Berg (2000, 203–205).

55 *Theol. Plat.* I 28 120, 22–121, 14, the prefinal chapter of the book. For symbolic indication as one of the four types of theological discourse Proclus distinguishes in Plato's work, see *Theol. Plat.* I 4.

56 *Ti.* 27c6, 50d3, 52d4–5 and *Theol. Plat.* I 28 122, 4–6. See also *in Ti.* I 220, 4–28.

57 *Theol. Plat. I* 28 122, 3–26.

58 *Theol. Plat.* I 28 122, 3–123, 7.

59 *Theol. Plat.* I 28 122, 23–26.

leader of motion, multiplier of powers, variety and emanation—all related to the Unlimited and the first plurality).[60]

Aphrodite is an example of the former: she is a superior maternal cause, inferior to the father, but superior to her offspring.[61] So on the one hand, then, Aphrodite is a female (emanative) cause, as others in Proclus' system. Kenaan proposes that we look back to the archaic sexual image of Aphrodite as escaping from the philosophical opposition between masculine and feminine (or essence and appearance, abstract and concrete, etc.).[62] Interestingly, late ancient Aphrodite also seems to transcend gender, albeit in a different respect. Because on the other hand, although Proclus' metaphysics assumes an emanative role for the feminine and a substantial one for the masculine, and hence groups Aphrodite with the feminine, to the extent that Aphrodite is the force which unites unequal members of an opposition, including that of male and female, she herself transcends that distinction. We see this in the context of the exegesis of *Ti.* 17c, the recap of the *Republic*, specifically the division of the classes (*in Ti.* I 35, 15–17). Proclus counts more than three classes, and seems instead to be dividing the labour as it is described in the *Republic*: farming, marriage, lottery, education and law, war, royalty, philosophy. The guardian of marriages is analogous to Aphrodite, he says, in that she is "responsible for all harmony and the union of male with female and form with matter."[63]

It is perhaps even clearer in Proclus' metaphysization of Homer's Theomachies and the paradox of gods waging war on one another (esp. *in R.* I 95, 22–26). Proclus shows the metaphysical necessity underlying such a fight, namely the combination of Limit and Unlimited which is the source of all production—production, that is, cannot come about without distinction and opposition.[64] Aphrodite's role is different from that of the other divinities involved. Where they oppose one another, she is the one who is to reconcile

60 *Theol. Plat.* I 28 123, 1–15.

61 Note that she is not superior to Eros in general, only to the Eros who is her offspring, as the first Eros emerges before the first Aphrodite, as mentioned above.

62 "The sexual image of Aphrodite was useful for the philosophical tradition that tends to create hierarchical dichotomies between feminine and masculine, appearance and essence, concrete and abstract, and metaphors of dress and nakedness, which stand for the opposition between lies and truth. As we have seen, however, these sets of oppositions do not hold in the case of the Archaic Aphrodite. Aphrodite's complexity escapes, thus, oppositional categories, and perhaps it is through her that it becomes possible for us to release ourselves from their domineering grip" (Kenaan, 2010, 49).

63 *in Ti.* I 34, 15 τὸ δὲ τῶν κοινῶν γάμων ἔφορον Ἀφροδίτῃ τῇ πάσης ἁρμονίας καὶ ἑνώσεως ἄρρενος πρὸς θῆλυ καὶ εἴδους πρὸς ὕλην αἰτίᾳ.

64 On the nature of this opposition see Martijn and Gerson (2017).

them, "bringing together opposites in love (φιλίαν)." More specifically, she is the one who sides with the weaker party. The assumption underlying all of Aphrodite's work as framed in Neoplatonic metaphysics is that opposites are never equal, but always form a hierarchically arranged opposition, and that bringing together opposites and reconciling them involves bringing the lower nearer to the higher, not the other way around. In Proclus' words: "the [worse things] in particular are the ones that get brought to order when they come to be in symmetry with and agreeable to those among the opposites that are better."[65] Aphrodite, then, unites humans with gods, but also lower gods with higher ones. And although she sides with the lower (the female, the Trojans), she is not one of them.

3.3 *The Beauty of the World and the Desire of Humans*[66]

The myth of Aphrodite's adultery with Ares is allegorized by Proclus on several occasions (*in Ti.* II 27, 16–28,7, *in R.* I 141, 4–14, 18). In the *Timaeus Commentary*, Hephaestus as the encosmic Demiurge is the cause of establishing cosmic connection, i.e. his chains, by tying differences (Ares) in harmony (Aphrodite). In the *Republic Commentary*, instead, both Hephaestus and Ares need Aphrodite, but Hephaestus, being the husband, is always at level superior to that of Ares, who is merely the lover. Ares cannot be in charge of oppositions without Aphrodite to maintain their harmony, and Hephaestus cannot adorn the universe without the beauty provided by Aphrodite. In other words, the latter needs her in the hypercosmic demiurgy of the sensible world and the former in the encosmic division of the universe by opposing forces.[67] But ultimately, of course, it is Zeus the Demiurge who sets up the collaborations of these three gods—or, to put it in metaphysical terms, they are all present in him paradigmatically.[68] As Proclus put it elsewhere, the Demiurge "brought forth Aphrodite

65 *in R. I 95.22–25* .πάρεστι καὶ ἡ Ἀφροδίτη, καθάπερ εἴπομεν, φιλίαν ἐμποιοῦσα τοῖς ἀντικειμένοις, συμμαχοῦσα δὲ ὅμως τοῖς χείροσιν, διότι καὶ ταῦτα μάλιστα κοσμεῖται σύμμετρα καὶ προσήγορα γινόμενα τοῖς ἀμείνοσι τῶν ἐναντίων.

66 As Sheppard (2017, 284–285) points out, when describing the beauty of the world (*in Ti.* I 330, 20–334, 27), Proclus uses the rare world καλλονή, which both he and Plotinus (1.6) tend to use of the highest transcendent beauty.

67 Baltzly (2007, 73 n. 109) with ref. to Lamberton (1989, 228–230). Note, however, that Hephaestus is not identical to the *hypercosmic* Demiurge, as Baltzly suggests (but I think this is a typo, as he refers to *in Ti.* II 70 where the difference between the two is expressly detailed). See also Van den Berg (2000, 244–245). Cf. *in Ti.* I 333, 2–4.

68 *in R.* I 143, 5–10. Festugière's translation of this passage is better than Baltzly's, which suggests that Hephaestus is superior to Zeus. The former, however, shows that the three gods are in Zeus 'paradigmatically'. Cf. Sheppard (1980, 68, 80–82).

in order that her beauty might shine forth and bring order, harmony and communion to all the things in the cosmos".[69]

Closer to home, the planets Mercury and Venus, as 'helmsmen of all of Becoming',[70] form an astronomical triad with the Sun, which Proclus considers analogous to the triad in the vestibule of the Good (*Philebus* 64c), where the Sun is the light of truth, Aphrodite the cause of beauty, and Hermes of proportion:

> [T]he Sun gives existence to light, which is an image of truth. Venus is responsible for the Beauty among things that are generated, which is in turn an imitation of the Beauty up there. Mercury, in turn, is responsible for Symmetry in everything since he has the status of *logos* for things in the realm of Becoming.[71]

In powers (and astronomical motions) Venus and Mercury differ from, are opposite to, the Sun, who is utterly transcendent and incommensurable, but they do reinforce its working and make it commensurable[72]—thereby bridging the gap between hypercosmic and encosmic, between transcendent and immanent.

A concrete yet ever so abstract example of how that role pans out in the physical world is found in a typical systematizing *tour de force*: Proclus reports with some sympathy a Pythagorean theory according to which the four elements, as well as the bonds between them discussed by Plato at *Timaeus* 32d, have their representatives at two planetary levels: celestial and aetherial. Cosmic Venus, the offspring of Jupiter (celestial air), is aetherial air, and together with Mercury (aetherial water) she applies her powers in connecting the extreme elements fire and earth (Sun and Moon).[73]

If we're looking for a vulgar Aphrodite in Proclus, however, our best shot is turning to the impact she has in the lives of human beings. This is elaborated

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69 *in Ti.* II 54, 21–23. The context is *Ti.* 32bc, on the four elements.

70 *in Ti.* III 68, 5 τοὺς κυβερνήτας τῆς ὅλης γενέσεως.

71 *in Ti.* III 66, 13–24: καὶ μήποτε … ταῖς πρώταις τρισὶ μονάσι ταῖς ἐν προθύροις τἀγαθοῦ προῆλθον ἀνὰ λόγον ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἥλιος, ὡς ἐμάθομεν ἐν Πολιτείᾳ, τῆς ἀληθείας εἰκόνα τὸ φῶς ὑπέστησεν, ἡ δὲ Ἀφροδίτη κάλλους ἐστὶν αἰτία τοῖς γενητοῖς, ὅ ἐστιν ἐκείνου μίμημα τοῦ κάλλους, ὁ δὲ Ἑρμῆς συμμετρίας πᾶσιν αἴτιος λόγος ὢν τοῖς περὶ τὴν γένεσιν: πᾶσα γὰρ συμμετρία καθ' ἕνα πρόεισι λόγον καὶ κατ' ἀριθμόν, ὧν ἐστιν ὁ θεὸς οὗτος δοτήρ. ἐκείνων οὖν τῶν μονάδων ὄντες ἀνὰ λόγον μετ' ἀλλήλων οὐσῶν εἰκότως καὶ αὐτοὶ συνεῖναι ἀλλήλοις ἐφίενται καὶ συμπεριπολεῖν. Cf. *in Ti.* II 267, 19–23 and III 69, 10–14.

72 *in Ti.* III 65, 31–66, 8.

73 *in Ti.* II 48, 15–31.

in Proclus especially in the reverting, not the emanating, side of the goddess. In his theology of the twelve gods from the *Phaedrus* (*Theol. Plat.* VI 18–22), the so-called 'separated' (ἀπόλυτοι) gods, i.e., the hypercosmic-encosmic souls, we find lower Aphrodite in the decad below the first dyad (Zeus and Hestia), and in a triad with either Apollo and Ares (ch. 18) or Apollo and Hermes (ch. 22).[74] With Hermes and Apollo, Aphrodite forms the last triad, of the elevating (ἀναγωγοῦ) gods, and of course she has the specific role of being the primary cause of erotic inspiration (ἐρωτικὴν ἐπίπνοιαν, cf. μανίαν at *Phdr.* 265b4–5)[75] which expands through everything, making the souls that are elevated (ἀναγομένας) by her at home (οἰκειοῖ) with beauty.[76]

Although Proclus does consider the erotic inspiration as such all-pervading, the passage in the *Phaedrus* is about life choices and talents, and hence the above does not concern all humans, only those who are Aphrodite's followers. A more universal function of Aphrodite we find in the *Timaeus*, regarding her emanative or creative role. In the last extant book of the commentary on the *Timaeus*, concerning the division of soul into planetary cycles (*Ti.* 38d), Proclus divides the labour of creating different aspects of the nature of living beings (and especially humans) in the sublunary realm and distributes them over the planets as demiurges or causes. There, Venus is coupled not to Mercury but to Ares, as respectively causes "of the appetitive desires" and "of the spirited motions" (τῶν ἐπιθυμητικῶν ὀρέξεων [...] τῶν θυμοειδῶν κινήσεων, *in Ti.* III 69, 21). This rather emphatic formulation is, one could say, as close as we get to pandemic Aphrodite. Lankila even translates "lustful desires"—parking Aphrodite squarely in the pandemic corner. Lankila may be right that Proclus has in mind

74 *Theol. Plat.* VI 18 85, 23–86, 4 Μέμνηται δὲ καὶ ἄλλων ἡγεμονιῶν μερικωτέρων καὶ τὴν εἰρημένην δεκάδα συμπληρουσῶν, οἷον Ἀπόλλωνος, Ἄρεος, Ἀφροδίτης, τὸ μὲν μαντικὸν τῆς ζωῆς εἶδος ἐξάπτων τῆς Ἀπολλωνιακῆς ἡγεμονίας, τὸ δὲ ἐρωτικὸν τῆς Ἀφροδισιακῆς, τὸ δὲ διαιρετικὸν τῆς Ἀρεϊκῆς. Καὶ γὰρ τὰ γένη τῶν βίων ἐντεῦθεν τὰ ὁλικώτατα καὶ πρώτιστα, καθ' ἃ καὶ τὰς νεοτελεῖς ψυχάς ⟨φησι⟩, εἰσοικιζομένας ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τὰς μὲν ἄλλο, τὰς δὲ ἄλλο ζωῆς εἶδος προΐστασθαι.

Saffrey and Westerink (1997, vol. VI, 172 n. 5) remark that the first three, Apollo, Ares and Aphrodite, are not mentioned explicitly in the *Phaedrus*, but are traditionally subordinated to Zeus. The latter threesome, with Hermes, is more faithful to the *Phaedrus*.

75 Lankila (2009, 32) translates "loving inspiration".

76 *Theol. Plat.* VI 22 98, 14–24 Λοιπῆς τοίνυν τῆς ἀναγωγοῦ τριάδος ὁ μὲν Ἑρμῆς φιλοσοφίας ἐστὶ χορηγός, καὶ διὰ ταύτης ἀνάγει τὰς ψυχὰς καὶ ταῖς διαλεκτικαῖς δυνάμεσιν ἐπ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἀναπέμπει τάς τε ὅλας καὶ τὰς μερικάς. Ἡ δὲ Ἀφροδίτη τῆς δι' ὅλων διηκούσης ἐρωτικῆς ἐπιπνοίας ἐστὶν αἰτία πρωτουργός, καὶ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν οἰκειοῖ τὰς ἀναγομένας ὑφ' ἑαυτῆς ζωάς. Ὁ δὲ Ἀπόλλων διὰ μουσικῆς τὰ πάντα τελειοῖ καὶ ἐπιστρέφει πάντα ὁμοπολῶν, ὥς φησιν ὁ Σωκράτης, καὶ δι' ἁρμονίας καὶ ῥυθμοῦ πρὸς τὴν νοερὰν ἀνέλκων ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὸ ἐκεῖ φῶς. Cf. In *Hymn* II 19–20, where Proclus plays on Eros' arrows when summoning Aphrodite to guide him up with her "most real arrows" (δικαιοτάτοισι βελέμνοις).

our lowest desires, but lust may be too specific and narrow. In the commentary on *Tim*. 44c–d, on the construction of humans, Proclus provides a list of correspondences between planets (or immanent gods) and elements of the microcosm that we are. On this list, of our irrational capacities, the *epithymetikon* is mentioned as corresponding with (τέτακται ἀνά λόγον), in the sense of having its causal origin in, Aphrodite.[77] The emphatic formulation may be an allusion to the distinction Proclus makes in his essays on the *Republic* between different types of desires (combining Plato's *Republic* with Aristotelian material, it seems).[78] If this is indeed the background, the reference is to appetitive desires, which are related to the body.[79] Importantly, however, we need the appetitive element in the soul, as it is involved in all striving. But in order for it to perform its role in humans realizing their full potential, it needs tightening and tuning; relaxing it 'into materiality' is what causes problems.[80] Any vulgarity would be due to a lack of 'tuning' in the recipient, comparable to what we saw in Hermias.

In any case, the difference with Plotinus is quite clear: where he makes Aphrodite the soul, which develops its own desire as part of reversion, Proclus has Aphrodite fill our microcosmic souls either with desires or with the irrational capacity of desire, facilitating the reversion of those who are well 'tuned'.[81]

3.4 *No Vulgar Aphrodite*

Despite this connection to base desire, nowhere in Proclus do we find Pausanias' vulgar Aphrodite.[82] The 'Aphrodisiac demons', however lowly, are still as

77 *in Ti.* III 355, 12–19: "Consequently some people are in the habit of saying that our intellective faculty has been made to correspond to the sphere of the fixed stars; whereas of our reason the theoretical corresponds to Kronos and the socio-political to Zeus and of the non-rational the spirited corresponds to Ares, the speech-related to Hermes, the desiring to Aphrodite, the sensation to the Sun and the vegetative to the Moon; the light-like vehicle to the heaven, while this mortal one corresponds to the sublunary world. Accordingly, so that you may be able to see the totality in a partial and particular fashion, the principle of construction involving humans has been made to correspond to cosmic physics as a whole." The "some people" remain anonymous, which Lankila (2009, 30) takes to betray some distance to the theory proposed, but on the basis of Tarrant (2017, *6.5*, n. 706), I am more inclined to think that this is Proclus' own view.

78 Specifically the Aristotelian distinction of three kinds of ὄρεξις, namely will, spirit and desire (ἐπιθυμία). The latter, when used in a narrow sense, refers to the desire for bodily pleasures, but it is also used more broadly for desiring other pleasures, e.g., that of learning. Cp. Aristotle *Rh*. I 11 1370a16–27.

79 *in R.* I 235, 15–16.

80 See, e.g., *in Cra*. 160 and especially *in Ti.* I 40, 27–41,1 and 117, 5–18.

81 For a description that is closer to Plotinus, Aphrodite as the "simplest and purest element of life", see § 3.4.

82 Van den Berg (2000, 245).

such elevating forces: demons have the same character as the gods they originate in. And Eros, as born from Aphrodite, is a special, divine, type of demon, different from other demons.[83] Any base desires and vulgar love is due to a participation of Aphrodite's gifts in an unfit recipient. This is also why Proclus can end *Hymn* II with a request to Aphrodite to steer him away from base desires: she only leads upwards.[84] An exception to this picture is found in the sixth essay on the *Republic*, where Proclus dismisses Paris as distracted by an image of intelligible beauty (as we saw in Hermias) rather than true beauty, which is considered an irrational and greedy choice, but does not (as we know from Homer, of course) completely exclude him from the assistance of Aphrodite.[85] In the ninth essay, Helen turns out to be a kind of Aphrodisiac daemonic soul possessed by the goddess, filled with beauty of both body and soul, and coming from heaven to misguide Paris.[86] In the bigger picture, of course, Paris' distraction was the result of divine plot.[87]

Just as Proclus takes pains to justify the assistance of Aphrodite, he also emphasizes the purity of the goddess when explaining the myth of her birth. Her birth out of semen that fell into the ocean tells us that Aphrodite is the "simplest and purest element of life", like foam floating on top of the water (of life). In other words, the desire summoned by Aphrodite does not weigh us down.[88]

Both fit his allegorizing Homer in the face of Platonic criticism, but also the overall Proclian metaphysics of evil, which denies the possibility of substantial evil.[89] That does not mean Proclus gets rid of vulgar love altogether, he just connects it to the recipient rather than to the bestower.[90]

For Proclus, Aphrodite's scope, although all-pervading, is still limited: she is but one of the Olympians, and both the shaping of the physical world and helping its inhabitants revert is a joint effort. This, combined with the importance of the *Timaeus* for Proclus, is probably why Aphrodite could never be the world

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83 *in Ti.* III 166, 2–14; *Theol. Plat.* VI 19 89, 21–24. On Eros as a demon different from others, see also D'Andrès (2010, 175).

84 *Pace* Van den Berg (2000, 207): "[T]his is exactly not, I would say, the goddess using her power 'for better or for worse', but for better and *against* worse. The statement at *in R.* I 109, 1–3 seems more narrow, however, as suggesting that a special favour of Aphrodite is required: ὁ γὰρ δὴ τελέως ἐρωτικὸς καὶ Ἀφροδίτῃ μέλων ἐπ' αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον κάλλος ἀνάγεται τῶν ἐν αἰσθήσει καλῶν ὑπερορῶν."

85 *in R.* I 108, 23–109, 7.

86 *in R.* I 254, 29–255,13. This is Theodorus' view, as presented and praised by Proclus.

87 Lankila (2009, 26–28).

88 *in Cra.* clxxxiii, 111, 19–20 πέφηνεν οὖν ἡ Ἀφροδίτη πάσης οὖσα τῆς ζωῆς τὸ ἐνοειδέστατον καὶ καθαρώτατον.

89 For Proclus' discussion of substantial evil, see Steel (1999).

90 On vulgar erotic love, see D'Andrès (2010, 101–109.).

soul in his system. Besides this downgrade for the goddess with respect to Plotinus' theory, however, we also see an upgrade in the fact that Pandemic love for Proclus is in the recipient, not in Aphrodite or Eros.

4 Ficino

By way of comparison, let us briefly look into the Renaissance reception of Neoplatonic Aphrodite/Venus. From Ficino to Pico, we seem to find a gradual return to Platonic 'simplicity', although the Neoplatonic complexity regarding the metaphysical relations of Aphrodite to beauty and love remains in the background. For Ficino, Eros or Amor stands for the circle of emanation and reversion. Aphrodite has a more limited, but crucial role to play. Ficino redistributes the two metaphysical directions of Venus over the two Venuses: the reverting aspect is assigned to uranian Venus and emanation to Paphian Venus, the daughter of Zeus and Dione:

> To sum up, Venus is two-fold. One is clearly that intelligence that we have located in the Angelic Mind. The other is the power of generation, which we have attributed to the soul of the world. And each has a love (*amor*) similar to herself as her companion.[91]

In his elaboration of the *amores*, Ficino adds a third type, which is not related to Venus, thereby liberating a human yet divinely focused love next to divine love above it by adding a vulgar love below it: uranian Venus is raised, in the company of *amor divinus*, to the level of Intellect, or the power of understanding. This *amor divinus* is *caritas*, and the beauty of Aphrodite at this level is the primary splendor of divinity. Paphian Venus (daughter of Zeus and Dione) is either natural beauty, as a *vis generandi* which gives life and shape to natural things, while at the same time "making the intelligible beauty accessible to our perception and imagination",[92] or more specifically the beauty of the soul, generating the human variant of *amor divinus*, which is in fact reverting

91 Ficino *De amore* II 7: Denique ut summatim dicam, duplex est Venus. Altera sane est intelligentia illa, quam in mente angelica posuimus. Altera, vis generandi anime mundi tributa. Ultraque sui similem comitem habet amorem. Cf. VI 7: Habet [scl. angelus] insuper intelligendi potentiam quam esse Venerem arbitramur. Potentia huiusmodi sua natura informis est et obscura, nisi a deo illuminetur, quemadmodum oculi vis ante solis adventum. See also Panofsky (1977) for further references; Aasdalen (2015), Rodríguez (2017, 303–304).

92 Panofsky (1977, 142).

reason (*ragione*/*ratio*). Next to this highest human love, we also find properly human love, which inspires a life of action, and finally, there is a non-Aphrodisiac, bestial love, or *amor ferinus*, which is in fact a disease. There is nothing Aphrodisiac—or even human—about this love, although humans do suffer from it. Ficino thus solves the problem of the thin line between love of beautiful sights and vulgar love by disconnecting them:[93]

> All love begins from sight. But from sight, the love of the contemplative human ascends to Mind. The love of the contemplative human is called divine, that of the active human is called human, and that of the lustful human is called bestial.[94]

At least in his division of labour of the two Aphrodites over emanation and reversion, and in disconnecting Aphrodite from vulgar desire, Ficino is much closer to later Neoplatonism than he is to Plotinus.[95] But what Ficino does here by separating *amor* off from Venus, Proclus could not do, due to the transcendence of Eros.

5 Conclusion

Aphrodite: goddess of beauty and love. Or is she? If we were to draw general conclusions concerning the similarities and differences between the thinkers discussed in this paper, they might be that Plotinus and Ficino use Aphrodite primarily for the human perspective, to answer the question how to live the good life, how to revert to our origin, and how to avoid being led astray. In these contexts, Aphrodite is either soul or a capacity of soul, which produces (and hence experiences, I imagine) love. Hermias and Proclus, however, are

93 Cf. Aasdalen (2015, 17). For the Stoic influence, see Boulègue (2007, 4).

94 Ficino *Conv*. IV 8 "Amor … omnis incipit ab aspectu. Sed contemplativi hominis amore ab aspectu ascendit in mentem. … Contemplativi hominis amor divinus, activi humanus, voluptuosi ferinus cognominatur." I'm assuming *amor* is the subject in the last sentence. See Aasdalen (2017, 15–17), for more detail on the different types of *amor*.

95 Pace Rodríguez (2017). Pico, who is very critical of Ficino's views, squarely puts vulgar Venus in the physical domain. Venus is beauty, perceivable either by the sense or by the intellect. Rodriguez discusses Pico's heavenly Venus, which attracts rational love. Panofsky has Uranian Venus for the intelligible realm and Saturnine Venus for reason. In any case, Pico objects to the ladder of love, and breaks it in two, claiming that sight can never be the beginning of ascent. Vulgar Venus will always be focused downward. See Panofsky (1977, 145), Aasdalen (2015, 17–18), Rodríguez (2017).

different. If we were to define the core of Aphrodite's activity in their writings, she is of course a bringer of beauty, and is indeed the cause of love, but more importantly, both the beauty and the love concern a core element of connection, of emanation and reversion, and of hierarchically ordered opposites. Not surprisingly, her profile also contains quite a bit more metaphysics than it does in the other philosophers. And fitting the Iamblichean emanation of the Good all the way down to matter, there is no vulgar Aphrodite, as pandemic love emerges only in the condition of the recipient of Aphrodite's gifts. This rejection of vulgar Aphrodite, we also see in Ficino. For all our thinkers, however, we could say that Aphrodite is not very mighty: next time round, the apple will go to Ouranos; Aphrodite seems reduced to a cosmic matchmaker, more than anything. Fortunately, however, her matches are made in heaven.

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CHAPTER 10

Neoplatonic Motifs in Emperor Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*

Christoph Helmig

Introduction

It is characteristic of Julian's approach to combine Greek and Roman myth and religious tradition with Neoplatonic metaphysical speculation. In the tradition of Middle Platonists such as Plutarch of Chaeronea (i.e., in *De Iside et Osiride*), our author tries to identify the elements of the myth of Cybele, Attis and Gallus with principles of the Neoplatonic chain of immaterial causes.

The Phrygian cult of *Cybele* (likely meaning originally something like "mountain goddess"), an Asian fertility divinity, also known as Mother of the Gods or great mother (*magna mater*), came to be known in mainland Greece around the 6th century BC. In Rome, it was introduced as early as the second war against Carthage:[1]

> After the Greeks the Romans took over the cult, when the Pythian god [sc. Apollo] had advised them in their turn to bring the goddess from Phrygia as an ally for their war against the Carthaginians.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 159C, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

Later in Roman mythography, Cybele was said to be a Trojan goddess, thus bearing a special relationship to the Roman people and their mythical ancestor Aeneas, prince of Troy. In Latin literature, we find several allusions to the figure of Cybele and her cult.[2] In the beginning of the fourth century BC, the early Christian apologist Arnobius raised a particularly fierce attack against the Roman cult of Cybele in the fifth book of his *Against the Pagans* (*Adversus nationes*), emphasising especially its more distasteful and repugnant traits.

1 At least according to the version Julian presents to us, but it is a matter of debate whether he may be slightly tendentious at times. However, this debate goes beyond the scope of the present article.

2 See Sfameni Gasparo (1985), Roller (1990), Borgeaud (2004), and Dubosson-Sbrigilione (2018).

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It is not unlikely that Julian wrote his hymn as a conscious reaction and rehabilitation of the goddess and her cult.

Julian's text, allegedly written down in one night and "without having read anything on the subject beforehand" (178D), concludes with a remarkable invocation or hymn (or rather prayer?), comparable to later Neoplatonic hymns as we find them, for instance, among the writings of Proclus. Regarding its underlying metaphysics, the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* ought to be compared throughout with Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*.[3]

From the point of view of the Platonic tradition, it is remarkable that Julian thinks that "the theories of Aristotle himself are incomplete unless they are brought into harmony with those of Plato" (162C). This explains, among other things, the prominence and criticism of Aristotle's fifth element (αἰθήρ) and its mediating role between the intelligible and material realm in the work.

Eventually, the impressively detailed rationalisation of the whole myth results in the insight that "the end and the aim of the rite of purification is the ascent of our souls" (175B). The concluding hymn, on the other hand, consists in a more personal invocation of the benefits of the "mother of gods and men" such as granting knowledge of the gods and perfecting theurgical practice. Finally, the eventual identification of Attis with the λόγος points to setting up an alternative to the increasingly popular Christian God, as has been argued convincingly in the case of his solar theology by Gábor Buzási, among others.

1 Structure of the Work

The structure of the whole work is relatively simple. It falls into three parts that are framed by a short introduction (158C–159A) and a final prayer (179D–180C). In the first part, Julian addresses the question of how the cult was introduced in Rome (159A–161B). The second part discusses the nature of the Mother of the Gods and her young lover Attis / Gallus as well as their respective roles as principles of reality (161C–168C). It mainly consists of a Platonic reading or allegorisation of the myth providing a long digression on intelligible causes and their interaction with matter. The third part, which very much builds on the second, offers, in much detail, Julian's interpretation of the myth as a purifica-

3 On Julian's philosophy and metaphysics, see, e.g., Dillon (2019), Opsomer (2008), De Vita (2011), and Smith (2012). A running commentary with ample introduction on the *Hymn to King Helios* is in preparation by Gábor Buzási (Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary).

tory ritual of the human soul, including the way this purification is performed along with the appropriate dietary prescriptions (168C–179D). This third section sets out to argue that even some more illogical or even violent elements of the ritual practice are appropriate if understood correctly. The following quote, from the beginning of the work, reminds us of both the structure and main elements of the hymn, even if their actual chronological order is slightly different from what we get in the text.

> Ought I to say something on this subject also? And shall I write about things not to be spoken of and divulge what ought not to be divulged? Shall I utter the unutterable? Who is Attis or Gallus, who is the Mother of the Gods [part 2], and what is the manner of their ritual of purification? [part 3] And further why was it introduced in the beginning among us Romans? [part 1]
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, introduction 158C–159A, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

2 Neoplatonic Allegorisation of Myth

The inquiry into the nature of the Mother of the Gods and Attis / Gallus (part two), in turn, presupposes some metaphysical background. For, as with Plutarch in *De Iside et Osiride* or similar works by Porphyry or the *De deis et mundo* by Julian's friend and advisor Sallustius, the allegorisation of the myth entails that the gods or demigods in question are identified with physical or metaphysical principles.[4] Interestingly, this section contains a criticism of Aristotle and, more specifically, a discussion of the doctrine of the fifth element or cyclic substance (i.e., αἰθήρ, which in the Latin tradition is referred to as *quintessentia*, but in Aristotle himself as the first element [πρῶτον στοιχεῖον]) and some reflexions on the relation between Plato and Aristotle. However, before going into more detail, let us first say a few words about the genre of Julian's text.

4 Porphyry is explicitly mentioned as the author of a work on the Mother of the Gods (161C). However, Julian claims not to have read it. The question remains why he would mention Porphyry after all. Hose (2008, 175) assumes that he does not directly want to engage with his reading of the myth and therefore feigns ignorance. On different Neoplatonic interpretations of the Mother of the Gods, see also van den Berg (2001), 171–174.

3 Why a Hymn?

Despite the fact that Julian's oration is commonly referred to as a *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, it is not a hymn in the classic sense, as we find it, for instance, among Proclus' works. It is not written in metre and contains other elements that are not typical for a hymn.[5] On the other hand, it contains a final hymnic prayer (presumably as in *Hymn to King Helios*, 158A "a hymn to express my gratitude to the god"). Interestingly, the final prayer is also called a hymn, a hymn in a hymn, as it was (179D). It has long been observed that both treatises betray a series of parallels, insofar as they are stylistically and philosophically similar. In both works, Julian repeatedly uses ὕμνος / ὑμνεῖν to characterise his text.[6] I want to suggest here that the real reason why Julian resorted to the term "hymn" has to do with his source, Iamblichus (ca. 240/245–320/325 CE). We know from Neoplatonists such as Syrianus, Proclus or Simplicius that the Syrian philosopher from Chalcis (the modern Qinnasrin, northern Syria) was highly regarded and one of the most creative minds of the Neoplatonic tradition. It is well known that Julian himself was heavily influenced by Iamblichus. The following text from the *Hymn to King Helios* illustrates this rather well.

> And so long as Helios grants let us all in common revere Iamblichus, the beloved of the gods. For he is the source for what I have here set down, a few thoughts from many, as they occurred to my mind. However I know well that no one can utter anything more perfect than he, nay not though he should labour long at the task and say very much that is new (καινοτομεῖν). For he will naturally diverge thereby from the truest knowledge of the god.
>
> Therefore it would probably have been a vain undertaking to compose anything after Iamblichus on the same subject if I had written this discourse for the sake of giving instruction (εἰ διδασκαλίας χάριν ἐποιούμην τοὺς λόγους). But since I wished to compose a hymn to express my gratitude to the god, I thought that this was the best place in which to tell, to the best of my power, of his essential nature. And so I think that not in vain has this discourse been composed.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to King Helios* 157D–158A, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

5 On the genre "hymn" in Julian, see Hose (2008). He calls Julian's hymns "prose hymns" (Prosahymnen) or "hymnic speeches" (hymnenartige Reden).

6 This is admittedly much more frequent in the *Hymn to King Helios* (see, e.g., *Hymn to King Helios* 131D, 158A; *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 179A, D) but because of the parallels between the two orations, it may be justified to call both hymns.

The text as it stands interestingly suggests that Julian called what he wrote on *King Helios* (and on the *Mother of the Gods*, I suggest) a hymn, but he did so because he did not want to compete with his source Iamblichus.[7] It is an important example of how a Neoplatonist dealt with the issue of authority. For Julian, Iamblichus' authority is to be compared with divine wisdom (or that of Plato himself). His works are such a perfect *summa* of Platonic philosophy that trying to compete with him or even improve on him would seem hopeless.

All this is very much in line with a more general tendency which can be found among Neoplatonic authors, namely to dismiss what is called καινοτομία ("[excessive or inappropriate] striving for innovation").[8] Rather Julian's own aim is much more modest. His *Hymn to King Helios*, as we learn above, aims at expressing his gratitude to the god (158A). The same holds true, I suggest, for the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*.

4 "Written in One Night ..."

> [I]t was granted to me to compose this hymn at a breath, in the short space of one night, without having read anything on the subject beforehand, or thought it over. Nay, I had not even planned to speak thereof until the moment that I asked for these writing-tablets. May the goddess bear witness to the truth of my words.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 178D–179A, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

The *Hymn to King Helios*, approximately one third longer than the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, Julian allegedly composed in three nights.

> This discourse, friend Sallust, I composed in three nights at most, in harmony with the three-fold creative power of the god, as far as possible just

7 While Opsomer (2008) argues how much Julian is indebted to Iamblichus, Nesselrath (2020, 61) is much more sceptical, asserting that he "differs from Iamblichus rather significantly".

8 Note that Julian uses the verb explicitly at *Hymn to King Helios* 157D. Note that καινοτομία / καινοτομεῖν was usually despised by Neoplatonic authors, because they considered themselves faithful followers of Plato. See, for instance, the famous passage in Plotinus (5.1[10].8, 10–14) where he presents himself as a mere exegete of Plato and emphasises that his doctrine of the three hypostases is not new (μὴ καινούς τούς λόγους) compared to what we already find in Plato.

> as it occurred to my memory: and I have ventured to write it down and to dedicate it to you because you thought my earlier work on the Kronia was not wholly worthless.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to King Helios* 157C, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

In addition to the issue of authority, it is a recurring motif in Neoplatonic works that texts are presented as divinely inspired. Take Plotinus, for instance, who allegedly never revised what he wrote or even looked at it again (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, § 8). Julian even goes a step further claiming that he hadn't even planned his text or read anything about it beforehand. It is obvious that the latter claim is at odds with what he says elsewhere about Iamblichus as source, but it is certainly in line with the Neoplatonic notion of divine inspiration.

5 The Ancient Myth (According to Julian)

As with other ancient myths, there are several versions of the story about Attis and the Mother of the Gods. Fortunately, Julian explicitly tells us with which version of the myth he is working.

> Of him [sc. Attis] the myth relates that, after being exposed at birth near the eddying stream of the river Gallus, he grew up like a flower, and when he had grown to be fair and tall, he was beloved by the Mother of the Gods. And she entrusted all things to him, and moreover set on his head the starry cap. […] Only as far as this did the Mother of the Gods permit this fair intellectual god Attis, who resembles the sun's rays, to leap and dance. But when he passed beyond this limit and came even to the lowest region, the myth said that he had descended into the cave, and had wedded the nymph. […] [I]t was his [i.e., the Lion's, a follower of Cybele] task to contend against the nymph and to be jealous of her union with Attis. (And who the nymph is, I have said.) […] And the myth says that the Lion serves the creative Providence of the world, which evidently means the Mother of the Gods. Then it says that by detecting and revealing the truth, he caused the youth's castration. What is the meaning of this castration? It is the checking of the unlimited. For now was generation confined within definite forms checked by creative Providence. And this would not have happened without the so-called madness of Attis, which overstepped and transgressed due measure, and thereby made him become weak so that he had no control over himself.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 165B–167D, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

6 The Cult

There are several versions of the cult of the Great Mother (Cybele). According to one, her priests (i.e., the Galli), castrated themselves on entering her service. This self-mutilation was derived from the myth itself, where Attis emasculated himself under a pine tree and died, having bled to death in the aftermath of the injury. During the annual festival of the Great Mother, from March 15–27, according to some sources, a pine tree was cut and carried to her temple, where it was given divine honours, as having sprung from Attis' own blood. Near the end of the festival, a special day was celebrated, the so-called "Day of Blood" (March 24), where the head of the priests (the archigallus) offered part of his own blood to her, while the other Galli danced madly and bespattered the pine tree and the altar likewise with their blood.[9] As one may expect, it was especially the self-mutilation of the priests and the bloody rites that made the cult of Cybele so repugnant for observers.

Even in Julian himself, we can observe a tendency to defend the credibility of the religious tradition. Consider especially the following text.

> As for this narrative, though some will think it incredible and wholly unworthy of a philosopher or a theologian, nevertheless let it here be related. For besides the fact that it is commonly recorded by most historians, it has been preserved too on bronze statues in mighty Rome, beloved of the gods. And yet I am well aware that some over-wise persons will call it an old wives' tale, not to be credited. But for my part I would rather trust the traditions of cities than those too clever people, whose puny souls are keen-sighted enough, but never do they see aught that is sound.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 161B, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

7 Christian Polemics against the Cult of Cybele

As said in the introduction, it is likely that with his hymn Julian wanted to rehabilitate the cult of Cybele against Christian polemics.[10] We know, for instance, that in the fifth book of Arnobius' *Against the Pagans* (*Adversus nationes*), several chapters are dedicated to a discussion of the myth and cult of Attis and

9 Cf. the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Great Mother of the Gods"; as well as Roller (1990, 119–234).

10 On this, see also Hose (2008, 171–175).

the Great Mother (V 6–16). He points out that the story and the ceremonies are absurd, indecent and wholly unworthy of gods. Some examples may suffice to illustrate his general strategy. In ch. V 8, he argues that although the Great Mother is supposed to be the mother of all gods, she cannot be older than 2000 years, pointing to an underlying contradiction in chronology. In ch. V 9, he takes issue with Jupiter's relation with his mother, i.e. the mother of the gods. In particular, he argues that such myths are altogether unworthy of gods.

> Would any one say this about the gods who had even a very low opinion of them? Or, if they were taken up with such affairs, considerations, cares, would any man of wisdom either believe that they are gods, or reckon them among men even?
>
> ARNOBIUS, *Against the Pagans* V 12, translated by HAMILTON BRYCE and HUGH CAMPBELL

> What say you, O races and nations, given up to such beliefs? When these things are brought forward, are you not ashamed and confounded to say things too indecent? We wish to hear or learn from you something befitting the gods; but you on the contrary, bring forward to us the cutting off of breasts, the lopping off of men's members, ragings, blood, frenzies, the self-destruction of maidens, and flowers and trees begotten from the blood of the dead. Say, again, did the mother of the gods, then, with careful diligence herself gather in her grief the scattered genitals with the shed blood? With her own sacred, her own divine hands, did she touch and lift up the instruments of a disgraceful and indecent office?
>
> ARNOBIUS, *Against the Pagans* V 14, translated by HAMILTON BRYCE and HUGH CAMPBELL

According to Arnobius, all this is utterly incredible and ignoble, and he adds that "[they] do not celebrate divine rites, but give a representation of sad events" (*Against the Pagans* V 17). However, by performing the rites that correspond to the myth of Attis and the Great Mother, their followers bear witness to the fact that they consider them true. As may be expected, he pays special attention to the alleged self-castration of the priests of Cybele, the Galli.

> [W]ho would believe that there is any honour in that which the worthless *Galli* begin, effeminate debauchees complete?
>
> ARNOBIUS, *Against the Pagans* V 17, translated by HAMILTON BRYCE and HUGH CAMPBELL

Julian counters such a criticism of ancient myths and rituals with two programmatic statements regarding the hidden truth of what seems strange or repulsive at first glance. This hidden truth is accessible to us by means of allegorical exegesis.[11]

> But let no one suppose my meaning to be that this was ever done or happened in a way that implies that the gods themselves are ignorant of what they intend to do, or that they have to correct their own errors. But our ancestors in every case tried to trace the original meanings of things, whether with the guidance of the gods or independently—though perhaps it would be better to say that they sought for them under the leadership of the gods—then when they had discovered those meanings they clothed them in paradoxical myths. This was in order that, by means of the paradox and the incongruity, the fiction might be detected and we might be induced to search out the truth. Now I think ordinary men derive benefit enough from the irrational myth which instructs them through symbols alone. But those who are more highly endowed with wisdom will find the truth about the gods helpful; though only on condition that such a man examine and discover and comprehend it under the leadership of the gods, and if by such riddles as these he is reminded that he must search out their meaning, and so attains to the goal and summit of his quest through his own researches; he must not be modest and put faith in the opinions of others rather than in his own mental powers. What shall I say now by way of summary? Because men observed that, as far as the fifth substance, not only the intelligible world but also the visible bodies of our world must be classed as unaffected by externals and divine, they believed that, as far as the fifth substance, the gods are uncompounded.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 170A–C, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

> But since I have mentioned also the myths that are suited to initiation, let us ourselves independently try to see what sort of myths they must be that suit one or the other of those two branches of philosophy; and no longer need we call in the aid of witnesses from the remote past for all points, but we will follow in the fresh footprints of one whom next to the gods I revere and admire, yes, equally with Aristotle and Plato. He does

11 Hose (2008, 173–175).

> not treat of all kinds of myths but only those connected with initiation into the Mysteries, such as Orpheus, the founder of the most sacred of all the Mysteries, handed down to us. For it is the incongruous element in myths that guides us to the truth. I mean that the more paradoxical and prodigious the riddle is the more it seems to warn us not to believe simply the bare words but rather to study diligently the hidden truth, and not to relax our efforts until under the guidance of the gods those hidden things become plain, and so initiate or rather perfect our intelligence or whatever we possess that is more sublime than the intelligence, I mean that small particle of the One and the Good which contains the whole indivisibly, the complement of the soul, and in the One and the Good comprehends the whole of soul itself through the prevailing and separate and distinct presence of the One. But I was impelled I know not how to rave with his own sacred frenzy when I spoke like this of the attributes of great Dionysus; and now I set an ox on my tongue: for I may not reveal what is too sacred for speech. However, may the gods grant to me and to many of you who have not as yet been initiated into these Mysteries to enjoy the blessing thereof!
>
> JULIAN, *To the Cynic Heracleios* 217b–218a, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

8 The Role of Theurgy

The story of how the cult (a ritual of purification) and a statue of the Mother of Gods came to Rome contains, at least, one element that plays an important role in Neoplatonic theurgy, i.e., the animation of statues. At 161A, it is said that the statue of the Mother brought from Phrygia was no artefact, "no work of men's hands but truly divine, not lifeless clay but a thing possessed of life and divine powers [...]."[12] That theurgy was certainly in the back of Julian's mind is made plain in the final prayer where he asks the Great Mother to make him perfect in theurgy (180B).[13]

12 Julian, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, 161A, translated by Wilmer C. Wright.

13 On theurgy in Julian, see the most useful remarks by De Vita (2011, 225–252). On the central role of theurgy in late Neoplatonism, see, for instance, van Liefferinge (1999), Tanaseau-Döbler (2013), and Addey (2014). Helmig and Vargas (2014) propose to challenge the widespread twofold division of theurgy (comparable to black and white magic) first proposed by Sheppard (1982).

9 The Incompleteness of Aristotle

There is a long section in the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* where Julian takes Aristotle to task on several aspects of his metaphysics. Interestingly, Julian's reasoning is prefaced by means of an interesting remark on the so-called harmony (συμφωνία) of Plato and Aristotle.

> For I hold that the theories of Aristotle himself are incomplete (ἐνδεεστέρως ἔχειν) unless they are brought into harmony with those of Plato; or rather we must make these also agree with the oracles that have been vouchsafed to us by the gods (ταῖς ἐκ θεῶν δεδομέναις προφητείαις).
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 162C–D, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

I take it that this passage is rather illuminating for an understanding of the late ancient notion of harmony (συμφωνία). It does not want to suggest that what Plato and Aristotle have to say about a specific philosophical problem is more or less identical. The text in question clearly contradicts such a reading of "harmony". On the one hand, Julian asserts that Aristotle's doctrines ought to be brought into harmony with those of Plato. On the other hand, rather surprisingly one may think, he states that Aristotle's philosophy is incomplete or deficient (ἐνδεές). How does this go together?

As a matter of fact, what Julian suggests here is a typically Neoplatonic move. Similar arguments can be found in Syrianus, Proclus or Simplicius. The problem in question is in what sense we can call Aristotle's philosophy deficient. In order to understand better what is at stake here, it is useful, I want to suggest, to turn to a paradigmatic text by Proclus that, although written sometime after Julian, illustrates the Neoplatonic attitude towards Aristotle quite well. In the preface to his *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, he compares Plato's and Aristotle's accounts of nature. Although Aristotle's *Physics* has its merits, he ultimately fails, one may say, to ask the right questions or to search for the appropriate causes. For Aristotle, he argues, only investigates immanent causes of things such as form and matter, but these causes are only subsidiary causes (συναίτια). The true (intelligible) causes of things, i.e., Platonic Forms, receive no attention. In the background stands the Neoplatonic principle that true causes transcend their effects (Proclus, *Inst. Theol.* § 75). To conclude, we may say that Aristotle's philosophy is deficient in that it disregards the true, intelligible causes of things.[14]

14 Steel (2003).

Nowadays, most scholars would argue that Aristotle approaches basic philosophical problems from a quite different point of view compared to Plato. He is not in need of transcendent Forms and criticises Plato's theory of Forms repeatedly in his extant works. In Neoplatonism, we observe an entirely different approach. Neoplatonists aim at discovering the intelligible causes of things and pointing out how the sensible world is derived from them. In Aristotle, on the other hand, the existence of the world and its eternity is presupposed. His account of phenomena such as time (χρόνος) or space / place (τόπος) is more descriptive in character. Criticising Plato's theory of Forms, he repeatedly appeals to the phrase "man begets man (and the sun)".[15] According to him, the Forms are not able to explain movement and generation. Generally speaking, he defends an ontology that is based on (sensible) individuals that are composed of form and matter (hylomorphism).

To the contrary, Neoplatonists assume that Aristotle's theory of generation ultimately presupposes transcendent causes. In Julian, we can observe a variation of this argument. He takes his start from the form in matter (εἶδος ἐν ὕλῃ) and argues that it is not autonomous, i.e. it presupposes a transcendent counterpart. The hylomorphic compound also presupposes higher causes that bring them together.

The fifth element (αἰθήρ) cannot be the cause for the forms in matter, because it is itself a compound (of form and matter). Finally, since according to Aristotle, actuality precedes potentiality, the forms in the soul, which exist potentially, must exist somewhere in actuality. In what follows, let us have a look at the individual arguments one after the other.

10 Aristotle Cannot Adequately Explain Generation

> [T]hat [...] it is not possible for generation to take place is, I think, clear and manifest. For why are there so many kinds of generated things? Whence arise masculine and feminine? Whence the distinguishing characteristics (διαφορά) of things according to their species in well-defined types, if there are not pre-existing and pre-established concepts (λόγοι), and causes (αἰτίαι) which existed beforehand to serve as a pattern (παράδειγμα)?
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 162D–163A, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

15 E.g., Aristotle, *Physics* II 2, 194b13. Gabór Buzási draws my attention to the fact that Julian

This passage addresses one of the fundamental differences between Plato and Aristotle. While Plato explained the recurring generation of identical species and genera by means of unchanging Forms, Aristotle simply took for granted that generation is regular and eternal. For a Platonist, the Forms are the paradigmatic causes of reality. According to Julian, only the variety of Forms safeguards the ordered variety of sensible particulars. It is interesting to note that Julian would refer to the difference of male and female in this context. Strictly speaking, in Plato there seems to be no Form of man or woman, but rather a Form of human being. For Aristotle, masculinity and femininity are not considered specific differences.[16] Therefore, in the early Middle Ages, there were some debates going on as to how biological sex is caused.[17] However, Julian most likely does not have such complications in mind but is referring to the "masculine" and "feminine" as the two elements of the procreational process.[18]

11 Actuality Precedes Potentiality

> Now the forms themselves must certainly subsist actually before they subsist potentially. If, therefore, the soul in us, as Aristotle himself believed, contains potentially the forms of existing things, where shall we place the forms in that previous state of actuality? Shall it be in material things? No, for the forms that are in them are evidently the last and lowest.
>
> Therefore it only remains to search for immaterial causes which exist in actuality prior to and of a higher order than the causes that are embodied in matter. And our souls must subsist in dependence on these and come forth together with them, and so receive from them the concepts (λόγοι) of the forms, as mirrors show the reflections of things; and then with the aid of nature it bestows them on matter and on these material bodies of our world. For we know that nature is the creator of bodies, universal nature (ὅλη φύσις) in some sort of the All; while that the individual nature (ἡ δὲ καθ' ἕκαστον φύσις) of each is the creator of particulars is plainly evident.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 164A, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

quotes and interprets this Aristotelian statement in *in Sol.* 131C and 151D. However, he considers it in accordance with Platonic theory.

16 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* X 9, 1058a29–34.

17 Steel (1995).

18 Gabór Buzási suggests comparing Julian, *in Sol.* 153B, where the central role of Aphrodite, Hera and the sun (Helios) in procreation is emphasised.

This text provides another stock argument from the Neoplatonic repertoire. If Aristotle argues that the soul contains all forms potentially and is the "place of the forms" (τόπος εἰδῶν), these Forms must pre-exist, following Neoplatonic reasoning, on a level of reality higher than soul, i.e. as transcendent Forms. From an Aristotelian perspective, one may argue that forms (concepts) enter the soul be means of induction or abstraction from the sensibles, i.e., that they exist in actuality but as immanent forms in things. Neoplatonists usually deny that we can form concepts on the basis of sensible particulars, because the latter are deficient.[19] Julian briefly alludes to this line of thought saying that "the forms that are in them [sc. material things / particulars] are evidently the last and lowest".[20] "Last and lowest" refers to the Neoplatonic hierarchy of beings, but a Peripatetic philosopher might respond that Forms exist first and foremost in matter and only derivatively (as abstractions) in souls or in the mind.

12 The Function of the Fifth Substance

> [T]o what, I ask, shall we hang the chain of perpetual generation, and on what shall we base our theories of the imperishability of the universe? For the cyclic substance itself is composed of matter and form. It must therefore follow that, even though in actuality these two, matter and form, are never separate from one another, yet for our intelligence the forms must have prior existence and be regarded as of a higher order. Accordingly, since for the forms embodied in matter a wholly immaterial cause has been assigned, which leads these forms under the hand of the third creator—who for us is the lord and father not only of these forms but also of the visible fifth substance—from that creator we distinguish Attis, the cause which descends even unto matter, and we believe that Attis or Gallus is a god of generative powers.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 165A–B, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

There was an ongoing debate among Neoplatonists as to the role of Aristotle's fifth substance (*quintessentia*, also referred to as first element, πρῶτον στοιχεῖον). Already among Peripatetics (such as Xenarchus) it was a rather contentious issue.[21] Aristotle introduced, alongside the four elements, a fifth ele-

19 Helmig (2012, 208–221).

20 Julian, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 164B, translated by Wilmer C. Wright.

21 According to Simplicius, Xenarchus wrote a book "against the fifth substance" (Simplicius,

ment serving as the stuff of the heavenly bodies. The fifth element is not subject to generation and corruption, it rather represents a type of matter that does not undergo change in the latter sense, but only performs locomotion (ὕλη κατὰ τόπον). It explains the eternity of the cosmos and at the same time the circular movement of the heavens. While the four other elements naturally move upwards or downwards, the natural motion of the fifth element is circular.

Interestingly, Julian refers to a, presumably Peripatetic, reading of Aristotle, in which eternal generation depends on the fifth element. It is not clear to me who shared such a theory, but more important for our purposes is the fact that Julian criticises it. The argument is twofold. The fifth element cannot be the cause of the forms in matter, because it is itself a compound of form and matter. Although the form of the fifth element is always in actuality, form must precede matter conceptually. Hence, forms in matter ought to possess a "wholly immaterial cause".

It is important to note that Julian (as was the case with Iamblichus before him) does not deny that aether exists. He only denies that it can be the only or highest cause of generation and enmattered forms.[22] The fifth element, because it consists of form and matter, ought to depend on higher intelligible causes, i.e., the Platonic Forms. This is a good illustration of what he himself calls the "incompleteness" of Aristotle's doctrines.[23] We may allow for the existence of aether only if it is supplemented by higher Platonic causes.

The text in question has also stirred the interest of scholars, because it mentions, next to Attis (or Gallus), a so-called "third creator" or "third demiurge" (τρίτος δημιουργός).[24]

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in Cael. 13, 22–28 and 14, 13–21 [= T2 Falcon] as well as *in Cael.* 21, 33–22, 17 and 20, 10–36 [= T3 Falcon]). See Falcon (2012, 25–36).

22 This may also explain why in a fragment of Xenarchus, preserved in Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* (T 13 Falcon), the Peripatetic is portrayed as someone who does not deny the existence of aether right away. It has been noted by Falcon (2012, 119–126), that this contradicts what we learn elsewhere about his position (most importantly in Simplicius' *Commentary on the De caelo*), but it can be explained, I suggest, by Julian's own philosophical agenda.

23 See above pp. 206–207.

24 See especially Lecerf (2012) who identifies the third demiurge with Adonis. However, Gábor Buzási reminds me that Adonis is not discussed in Julian except in *Caesares* 329c. This is difficult to bring into accordance with the fact the he allegedly plays such an important role in the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*. On the nature of the third demiurge as well as Attis and Cybele, see also the detailed analysis by Opsomer (2008, 148–156).

13 The Nature of Attis

The most intriguing philosophical feature of the hymn is undoubtedly Julian's interpretation or allegorisation of Attis, in the context of which he also mentions a so-called "third demiurge" (τρίτος δημιουργός).[25] What is the precise nature of the latter and what is the metaphysical role of Attis? The following text establishes an explicit connection between Attis and the third demiurge. Attis is referred to as the "last nature" (ἡ τελευταία φύσις) of the third demiurge "that even descends unto our earth".

> Now there are many substances and very many creative gods (δημιουργοί), but the nature of the third creator (τρίτος δημιουργός), who contains in himself the separate [i.e., separate from matter], transcendent concepts of the forms that are embodied in matter and also the connected chain of causes, I mean that nature which is last in order, and through its superabundance of generative power descends even unto our earth through the upper region from the stars,—this is he whom we seek, even Attis.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 161D–162A, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT, slightly modified

Because of the connection of Attis and the third creator, Wilmer C. Wright, in a note to her translation of the passage, suggests identifying the third creator with Helios (the sun) and Attis with a (lower) aspect of this third creator, namely "the light of the sun".[26] A text shortly before points in the same direction. There, Attis is called "the substance (οὐσία) of the generative mind which engenders all things down to the lowest plane of matter".

> But him whom I call Gallus or Attis I discern of my own knowledge to be the substance (οὐσία) of generative and creative Mind (γόνιμος καὶ δημιουργικὸς νοός) which engenders all things down to the lowest plane of matter, and comprehends in itself all the concepts (λόγοι) and that is the causes of the forms that are embodied in matter (ἔνυλα εἰδή).
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 161C, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

25 On Julian's Neoplatonic theology, see Bregman (1999), Opsomer (2008), De Vita (2011), Lecerf (2012).

26 Admittedly, the text she adduces (*Hymn to King Helios* 4, 140A) does not say this and the parallel passage does not prove his point; it does not even talk of a third demiurge. However, later in the text, Attis is said to resemble the sun's rays (165C).

Both passages confirm the relation of the third demiurge with Attis. The next text is even more explicit in terms of Neoplatonic metaphysics, because it asserts that Attis proceeds (προιέναι) from the third demiurge.

> Therefore it is not contradictory to suppose that our Attis is also a sort of demigod—for that is actually the meaning of the myth—or rather he is altogether a god, for he proceeds (πρόεισι) from the third creator, and after his castration is led upwards again to the Mother of the Gods.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 168A, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT, slightly modified

From all this emerges that Attis belongs to the creative gods. It represents an aspect of divine causality that is in contact with matter and informs it, because it carries the causes of enmattered forms. Contrast this with the third creator who is said to contain the Forms in a transcendent manner (161D).[27]

This is confirmed by a last passage (165A) emphasising that we ought to distinguish Attis and the third demiurge from each other.

> Accordingly, since for the forms embodied in matter a wholly immaterial cause has been assigned, which leads these forms under the hand of the third creator—who for us is the lord and father not only of these forms but also of the visible fifth substance—from that creator we distinguish Attis, the cause which descends even unto matter, and we believe that Attis or Gallus is a god of generative powers.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 165A, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

Having clarified the metaphysical relation of Attis with the third demiurge it is still somewhat unclear what their position in the metaphysical hierarchy is. What is more, the third demiurge does not figure in the original myth of the Mother of the Gods and Attis. Rather, it is, it seems to me, an element Julian uses in his exegesis and allegorisation to clarify the status and provenience of Attis.

14 Levels of Forms

In his *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, Julian is interested, I take it, in the philosophical problem of how intelligible forms and matter can interact. As with

27 … ὃς τῶν ἐνύλων εἰδῶν τοὺς λόγους ἐξῃρημένους ἔχει.

other Neoplatonists, transcendent Forms are the causes of what ultimately informs matter, i.e. forms in matter. Now, the question is where these forms come from and where we have to locate, as it were, their transcendent, incorporeal principles. Julian suggests two possible candidates for this, the αἰθήρ (cyclic substance) or Attis:

> But this is perhaps worthwhile to inquire, how the cyclic substance can contain the incorporeal causes (ἀσώματοι αἴτιαι) of the forms that are embodied in matter (ἔνυλα εἴδη).
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 162D, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

As discussed, the αἰθήρ cannot be the container of these principles, because it is composed of matter and form (165A). The whole criticism of the αἰθήρ intends to argue, probably contrary to claims originating in the Peripatetic tradition, that it is Attis (not αἰθήρ) that ultimately causes the forms in matter.

Note that a systematic allegorisation of a myth may entail that an author slightly tampers with the original wording of the mythical story. A telling example is the way Julian deals with Attis' semi-divine status. For according to him, although the "myth calls him a demigod (ἡμίθεος)", he is "the lowest in order of the gods" (168A–B). This characterisation brings us back to the question of the exact nature of Attis and we may finally pull all the strings together and ask, once again, what the ontological status of Attis and the third demiurge is.

Wilmer C. Wright's note on 165A proposes to identify Attis with nature and Helios with the world soul. Regarding the couple Attis—nature she refers to 162A where Attis is called "nature" (φύσις). It is true that the word φύσις occurs at 162A in the context of a depiction of Attis. On the other hand, as we have seen, Attis is not termed φύσις without qualification. Rather, it is the "ultimate φύσις" of the third creator. What this implies is spelled out at 168A, where Attis is said to proceed (πρόεισι) from the third creator.

One passage, however, that contrasts Attis and the fifth Aristotelian substance, suggests, *pace* Wright, that Attis is a soul-like entity.

> For in this way was mighty Attis destined to be an even mightier creator (δημιουργός), seeing that in all things the conversion to what is higher produces more power to effect than the inclination to what is lower. And the fifth substance itself is more creative and more divine than the elements of our earth, for this reason, that it is more nearly connected with the gods. Not that anyone, surely, would venture to assert that any substance

> / body (σῶμα), even if it be composed of the purest αἰθήρ, is superior to soul undefiled and pure [...].
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 166D, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT, slightly modified

Here are the arguments in favour of Attis being a soul or soul-like entity. It is called the lowest of the gods. Compare Plotinus who asserts that the realm of the divine ends with soul (5.1[10].7, 48–49: καὶ μέχρι τούτων τὰ θεῖα), while nature is usually not considered a god in Neoplatonism.[28] The descent and return of Attis reminds us of soul. It is not typical of nature which is always in contact with bodies. In this context, it is interesting to observe that later on in the text Attis is called a λόγος (179C), which was, especially in Middle Platonism, the mediating principle par excellence.[29] Consider too that fifth substance is a part of nature, while Attis as immaterial god transcends the realm of nature. Finally, Julian himself tells us that soul "with the aid of nature" (164B) bestows the forms on matter. Thus, nature taken in itself is not autonomous in this respect.

If the identity of Attis can be compared to that of a soul and λόγος,[30] the question remains what Julian wanted to allude to by means of the "third demiurge" and what it stands for. Furthermore, why is the demiurge in question called third? The term does undoubtedly presuppose a Middle or Neoplatonic reading of the *Timaeus*. Some time ago, a suggestion was made by Adrien Lecerf to identify the third demiurge with Adonis. He compares several texts in Proclus and concludes that Iamblichus may be in the background of the threefold demiurgy found later in Proclus. Lecerf's solution is interesting, and I am inclined to follow him. However, a small concession should be made with regard to this theory insofar as the relation between Adonis and Attis requires some more analysis. On the one hand, it is difficult to mark off Adonis and Attis from each other; on the other they also seem to share certain attributes. This is probably due to the fact that Julian could not make Attis a demiurge in its own right because of its close contact with matter. It is at this point where philosophical allegorisation reaches its limits.

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28 On Neoplatonic theories of nature (φύσις), see Martijn (2010), and Golitsis (2019).

29 There is a broad literature on the Platonic concept of *logos* in Middle Platonism. See, for instance, Helmig (2005, 26 with note 46 and 30–31).

30 See also Dillon (2019, 238) who points out that Julian identifies Attis with the demiurgic λόγος.

15 The Twofold Nature of the Mother of the Gods

As with Attis, we need to investigate the exact place of the Mother of the Gods in the Neoplatonic hierarchy.[31] What interests us most in the present context is (1) the name of the divinity which suggests a rather prominent place in the divine hierarchy and (2) the double nature of the Mother of the Gods, for it is called both the mother and the spouse of Zeus (166A–B).

Generally speaking, mother-goddess figures are found in almost every ancient religion, but these figures, who were usually only goddesses of fertility and reproduction in general, should not be confused with the Great Mother of the Gods, who was regarded as the giver of life to gods, human beings, and beasts alike. How ought we to understand her role as mother? Is she mother in the sense of a first principle and origin of all gods? The answer to this question certainly has a bearing on her place in the metaphysical hierarchy.

> Who, then, is the Mother of the Gods? She is the source of the intellectual and creative gods, who in their turn guide the visible gods: she is both the mother and the spouse of mighty Zeus; she came into being next to and together with the great creator; she is in control of every form of life, and the cause of all generation; she easily brings to perfection all things that are made; without pain she brings to birth, and with the father's aid creates all things that are; she is the motherless maiden, enthroned at the side of Zeus, and in very truth is the Mother of all the Gods.
>
> JULIAN, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 166A–B, translated by WILMER C. WRIGHT

This passage brings out rather well the complex nature of the Mother of the Gods. As it turns out, for Julian she is not part of a chain of female causative principles, but rather a kind of self-constituting entity (αὐθυπόστατον), in the terminology of Proclus, and in this sense a *causa sui*. She is a "motherless maiden" and at the same time mother and "source" of the intellectual and creative gods, but she is also the one who limits the procession of Attis towards matter and turns him back to her (168A, alluding to the Neoplatonic theory of reversion).

The Mother of the Gods also plays an important part in the Neoplatonist Proclus, and one of his philosophical hymns (Hymn VI "On the Mother of the Gods,

31 See Roller (1990).

Hecate and Ianus") is dedicated to her.[32] What is more, according to his biographer Marinus, the Neoplatonist had a special relation to this deity.[33] Therefore, it may be interesting to look for some points of comparison. Most scholars agree that Proclus identifies the Mother of the Gods with Rhea.[34] She is said to produce, together with Kronos, the universal classes of gods, including Zeus (the Demiurge).[35]

However, there are also intriguing parallels between the Mother of the Gods in Julian and Proclus' treatment of the Orphic figure of Night.[36] In Proclus, she is "the first feminine deity […]" and "the mother goddess that receives, reveals and mediates to the divine orders intelligible being and the good".[37] Moreover, she is the one that gives oracular advice to the demiurge before "undertaking the entire creative task".[38] Despite several remarkable similarities there are also differences when it comes to details, but this is certainly due to the different religious and cultic traditions the Mother of the Gods and Night stem from, the latter belonging to Orphism.

Julian's characterisation of the Mother of the Gods also reminds us of an interesting parallel in the Catholic tradition where Virgin Mary is considered both the mother and *bride* of Christ.[39] As a rule, Neoplatonic allegorisation would deal with the double nature of the Mother of the Gods by assigning her

32 See van den Berg (2001, 252–273).

33 Marinus, *Vita Procli* § 33. Marinus also says that Proclus dedicated a whole monograph to the Mother of the Gods.

34 Cf. Julian, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 159B. In Proclus, Rhea is actually twofold, one on the same level as (identical with) the Mother of the Gods and one imitating her; see van den Berg (2001, 252–254 and 261).

35 See van den Berg (2001, 252–254).

36 I owe this observation to Danielle A. Layne. See her contribution (in this volume) and (2021) for female principles in Proclus' metaphysics.

37 Danielle A. Layne, (in this volume), 226.

38 Proclus, *in Ti.* I 206, 28–207, 20. (trans. Runia and Share): [The Demiurge] before undertaking the entire creative task is said to enter the oracular shrine of Night to fill himself with divine thoughts from there, to receive the principles of the creative task and, if it is permissible to speak thus, to resolve all difficulties and above all to encourage his father [Kronos] to collaborate with him in the creative task. This is what he is recorded as saying by the Theologian in his poem: *Mother, supreme among the gods, immortal Night, how, tell me,/ How should I establish a resolute beginning for the immortals?*/ And from her he hears: *Surround all things with unutterable ether, and in the middle place heaven.*/ And he is then instructed about the remainder of the creative work. The passage is quoted in Layne (in this volume), 242–243.

39 Flanagan (1962). On the parallels of the Mother of the Gods and Attis with the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ, see Nesselrath (2020, 54–55 with notes 43–44). In this context, he calls Attis "a kind of saviour figure".

two positions in the metaphysical hierarchy and treat her, for instance, as a god and a demigod (δαίμων) or something comparable such as the being and the activity of one and the same entity.[40] Julian does not try to resolve this tension in the present work, and I suggest that this is due to the fact that he is writing a (mere) hymn, not a philosophical treatise.

16 Conclusion

Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* is an interesting document of post-Porphyrian allegorisation of myth. It is the most comprehensive interpretation of the myth of Cybele and Attis that has been preserved from the period of Neoplatonism.[41] As he himself repeatedly asserts, especially in the *Hymn to King Helios*, Julian is heavily indebted to his teacher Iamblichus of Chalcis. We have seen that the genre "hymn" allows Julian to deal with his source in a specific manner. He does not have to go beyond what Iamblichus has already said about the matter in question, but is content presenting it in a hymnic form. He does not have to resolve tensions that are based on the theology of the myth (e.g., the double nature of the Mother of the Gods; the nature of the "third demiurge"). As a result, some issues are left vague, most probably on purpose.

As a whole, the hymn can be seen as a reaction to Christian polemics about the allegedly cruel and bloody rites of the priest of Gallus. It is, in other words, a rehabilitation and, in part, sublimation of the cult as a purificatory ritual, but it also represents a most interesting document on how Aristotle's fifth essence (αἰθήρ) was interpreted and criticised in late Antiquity. As a matter of fact, the rather peculiar, if not paradoxical nature of the Aristotelian αἰθήρ (material, but incorruptible, not changing, eternal, divine, naturally moving in a circle) paved the way to credit it with diverse functions. The allegorisation of the myth firmly opposes readings of αἰθήρ that make him the cause of enmattered forms. Rather, as with other Neoplatonists, Julian aims to show that Aristotle's hylomorphism presupposes a Platonic theory of transcendent Forms. In this context, the harmony (συμφωνία) of Plato and Aristotle is invoked to ultimately prove the superiority of the former over the latter. For only Platonic metaphysics may amend the incompleteness of the Aristotelian system.

40 Danielle A. Layne aptly remarks that in Proclus Night becomes both Hera and Themis (the dual brides of Zeus/Demiurge) insofar as Hera acts as the principle of procession and Themis as the providential principle of reversion. Cf. Layne (in this volume), 228, 231.

41 See also Sallustius, *De deis et mundo* § 4.

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CHAPTER 11

Otherwise Than the Father: Night and the Maternal Causes in Proclus' Theological Metaphysics

Danielle A. Layne

> All of Western culture rests on the murder of the mother.
>
> IRIGARAY, *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mere*, p. 81

•••

> For there were a considerable number of episodes, that were of almost daily occurrence, when this goddess spoke or acted in [Proclus'] favor; and their number and character are so unusual that I myself do not have their exact and precise memory. If anyone desires to know with what favor he was attached to this goddess, let him read Proclus's book on the Mother of the Gods, and it will be seen that with inspiration from on high he has been able to expound the whole theology relative to the goddess, and to explain philosophically all that the liturgical actions and the oral instructions mythically teach us about the goddess [...].
>
> MARINUS, *The Life of Proclus* § 33 (trans. GUTHRIE)

⁘

Looking to expose the longstanding erasure of the feminine in philosophical/patriarchal discourses, feminist critics like Luce Irigaray have argued that within the gendered narratives of creation there exists a hidden act of matricide. Succinctly put, the rise of mythologies and religious narratives in which we see the prevalence of attention focused on masculine, paternalistic deities that create or give birth to the cosmos autogenetically or *ex nihilo* are simply symbolic projections of male fantasy.[1] Indeed, for Irigaray these are myths con-

1 See also Irigaray (1985) as well as Loraux (1995, 13 and 17) who writes of the myth wherein

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structed from masculine anxiety, a fear of impotence before the creative and reproductive agency of the mother. Furthermore, patriarchal obsession with Father-son lineages such as the passing of power from Ouranos to Kronos to Zeus, or the Judeo-Christian god the Father whose son not only inherits the kingdom but is, in fact, simply the Father *encore*, reinforce that within patriarchal economies all things remain the same, i.e., new kings merely reproduce the value of masculine rule, perpetuating the sense that things cannot be otherwise than the Father.[2] Furthermore, these genealogies in patriarchal myth and history ultimately silence or fail to take seriously the lineage of women, shrouding Mother-daughter relationships in a veil of subjugated anonymity. This concealment of the lineage of women reinforces the fact that within patriarchal discourses there is no room for narratives concerned with what the mother can give to her daughters, what women inherit from other women.[3] For the patriarchal masculine, the mother has nothing of value to give. She has created nothing, ruled nothing. She is nothing. Ergo, to echo Zarathustra, if God is an impotent woman, we can safely say *she* is dead and *we* have killed her.

Of course, as I have already suggested, this historical eclipse of the feminine role in the act of creation or within classical theogonies is most patently

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Zeus swallows Metis and consequently gives birth to Athena: "And for the hearer of the myth, this fantasy, even if not an act of 'usurpation' amounts to appropriating, as Zeus does, one of the most widely recognized manifestations of femininity in order to strengthen the notion of virility, which is probably more threatened than would appear. [...] Moreover, instead of penis envy, the recurring issue has been the Greek male's longing, which must be given its correct name, 'pregnancy envy,' [...]."

2 In Layne (2021) I discuss how this is patriarchy's insistence on creating what Irigaray calls an "other-of-the-same", i.e. not a true other but simply the inversion of masculinity insofar as the Other is merely a reflection that reinforces or substantiates masculine power. In these economies the Other is determined as weak, needy, dependent on the masculine, therein perpetuating an image that casts the masculine in the role of that which orders or cares for the dependent, unruly feminine. This is simply the image masculinity desires to see in its Other and thereby is not a true or authentic Other that challenges the reign of the Father. See Irigaray (1996) and (1985) as well as DuBois (1988) for the now classical feminist reading of Plato and his *khôra* as appropriating the feminine body/activities for masculine prerogatives.

3 As the external reviewer noted, we should still call to mind the reverence classical Athenians had for the Eleusinian Mystery tradition which honors the relationship between Demeter and Persephone respectively. However, I would argue that within modern and post-modern reception this tradition has been overshadowed by more patriarchal/rationalistic accounts of Greek mythological/theological beliefs. One thing that is important to keep in mind is how we have received the so-called "canon" of Greek thought, i.e. is it as susceptible to the accusation of patriarchal logic as we might be inclined to believe or has the reception of it been shrouded by masculinist interpretations? See Decker, Layne and Vilhauer (forthcoming) for a collection of essays that attempt to reread the canon of Greek philosophical and cultural beliefs as 'otherwise' than wholly masculinist/patriarchal.

present in the rise of Judeo-Christian conceptions of creation but is also a hallmark of classical Greek cosmologies—most pertinently for our purposes, in Plato's *Timaeus* where the feminine receptacle and nurse of becoming is explicitly deprived of an active casual role in creation. She is simply an errant cause (48a), a thing only to be thought through a kind of bastard reasoning (52b). Put otherwise, unlike the Demiurge who is revered in his creative acts as Maker and Father of the cosmos (28c), Mother is simply a kind of unfortunate necessity.[4] In short, Plato, as some feminists see it, has committed the primordial act of matricide whereby she, the maternal, survives only as an *inscriptional space*, a *specular* surface that reflects back masculinity's desire to see itself as self-sufficient, as without need of the other, as the virile and potent source of all creation.[5]

Indeed, at first blush, this death of a feminine/maternal cause appears to be a problem of the late antique Platonist, Proclus, who not only explicitly subordinates the feminine to masculine causes,[6] but also fails to reserve a pride of place to the feminine in his five-, sometime six-fold, reinterpretation of Platonic causality. In this schema, Proclus regards two of the three "true causes", i.e.

4 To be sure, this account of Plato's feminine cause is certainly hyperbolic, casting aside, for the sake of feminist argument, more charitable readings of the *Timaeus* wherein one could argue for the value of the erotic, the essentiality of feminine necessity, the beauty of things typically coded as feminine within patriarchal discourse, i.e. the body, desire, emotion, madness, etc. Indeed, one could argue that as a by-product of the Athenian patriarchal culture, Plato's *Timaeus* is a feminist *tour de force* insofar as it frustrates the masculine desire to escape the messy embodied world insofar as *she*, the sensible, is divinized, making her heavenly movements the source of our own ability to become godlike. Yet, regardless of how much one wishes to "save Plato" from such feminist criticism, it cannot be denied that Plato's narrative inspired generations of male philosophers to focus on the power of the demiurgic Father, a focus that would come at the detriment of the Mother, a detriment that would manifest itself, at best, in a kind of silence with regard to her casual role in creation or, at worst, her exclusion, or, as Irigaray would deem it, her murder at the hands of her sons.

5 See J. Butler (1993, 13). To be sure, J. Butler in this text is reflecting on Irigaray (1985, 179) wherein after quoting at length from Plotinus' *Enneads*, particularly *Enn.* 3.6.19, 1–41, so as to prove the Neoplatonist's debasement of Matter, coded as a kind of feminine, reduced of generative power and made only to be a thing of receptivity, she writes: "… by a remote symbolism, the nearest they could find, they indicate that Matter is sterile, not female to full effect, female in receptivity only, not in pregnancy: this they accomplish by exhibiting Matter as approached by what is neither female nor effectively male but castrated of that impregnating power which belongs only to the unchangeably masculine."

6 See *in Ti.* I 46, 17–47, 8: "Even where gender had been divided, male and female of the same rank have the same tasks; it is accomplished in an initial way by the male and in a subordinate way by the female. Hence in mortal creatures too nature has revealed the female as weaker in all things than the male. Indeed everything which proceeds from the male is also brought to birth by the female, preserving its subordinate role," (trans. Tarrant).

the creative and paradigmatic, as "paternal" causes, while the merely supplemental causes, i.e. nature, the receptacle and enmattered form, are all in some way or another associated with the feminine.[7] While ingeniously undermining Aristotelian criticism of Platonic metaphysics and theology,[8] Proclus, insofar as he delegitimizes what has historically been coded as feminine—Plato's receptacle and nature, as well as form polluted by its immanence—seems to commit himself to patriarchal logic.

Nonetheless, while certainly operating within this problematic framework, upon closer examination Proclus' theological metaphysics does not consistently fall within this logic. Rather, when we return to a strange absence in Proclus' formal etiology, we begin to see a glimmer of the maternal and her subversive power from within the Neoplatonic system—an absence that certainly harkens to Proclus' testified devotion to the mother goddess. As any seasoned veteran of late Platonic metaphysics recognizes, his six-fold schema of causes maps quite clearly onto his understanding of the grades of reality whereby material, formal and instrumental cause are immanent to the realm of soul and body while the productive and paradigmatic correspond to the first and second triad of Intellect, i.e., the intelligible and the intellectual respectively. Interestingly for our purposes, what this six-fold schema passes over is the necessary movement of the intelligible-intellective, otherwise termed Life, corresponding to the necessary processive power that constitutes the connection between the intelligible and the intellective. For Proclus, this connective or binding cause is "the font of all unification (ἑνώσεως), through which even intellect is conjoined to the intelligible, bringing forth the light of truth which, of course, is the very first bond."[9] This bond (δεσμός) is the cause of communion, the connection between things opposed to one another (συνάπτω), the source of harmony not only in the intelligible sphere but also in the sensible cosmos itself. It is, in short, *that by which* all things are joined or literally knitted together (συναρτάω) and, as such, is the dynamic living thread binding the one and the many, the same and the different, the transcendent and the immanent into what Proclus calls an indissoluble friendship.[10] Indeed, what is striking for our

7 See *in Ti.* I 2, 30–33, 4 and *in Ti.* I 2, 1–8 for the clearest presentation of the six causes which are 1) final, 2) paradigmatic, 3) efficient/creative, 4) instrumental, 5) formal and 6) material. Notable references to this schema include *in Ti.* I 12, 21, I 143, 19–22, I 263, 20 and *in Alc.*, 168, 21–169, 2. For more information on these causes in Neoplatonism and Proclus see Siorvanes (1996, 88–91), Gerson (2005, 101–130), Tarrant (2007, 50, 94–95n. 12), Steel (2003, 181 and n. 19, 21 and 22), and Layne (2016).

8 See Steel (2003).

9 *in Ti.* II 16, 15–17, 6.

10 See *in Ti.* II 53, 14–25.

purposes is that this binding and connective cause, the power that constitutes the contact between things, is coded by Proclus, perhaps explicitly following the Chaldean Oracles,[11] as feminine. As Proclus writes of the second triad of Life or Power at the level of Intellect:

> Power therefore was the cause, not of division, but of communion (κοινωνίας), of contact without separation (ἀδιακρίτου συναφῆς) and of the relation of the one to being, and being to the one. Hence it is necessary that it should neither be arranged according to intelligible power, nor according to the intellective difference of beings; but that being the intermediary of the two, it should subsist analogous to intelligible power, but should generate in the last of the intellectives the portion of the different. What else can this be than the femininity of the Gods?[12]
>
> *Theol. Plat.* IV 90, 20–91, 1, trans. TAYLOR, slightly modified

In other words, Proclus seems to allocate to the feminine one of the most important and influential causes in his metaphysical system. Proclus, described by Marinus as particularly graced by the Mother of the Gods, unambiguously assigns the role of intelligible touch or contact between the intelligible and the intellective to the feminine. She is ultimately the mediating or, more Platonically construed, erotic cause which births a strange but essential child if the cosmos is to be connected to the Good, if that which proceeds is to return/revert to its cause. Put otherwise, she is not simply the principle of procession that generates multiplicity, nor is she simply a passive womb. Rather, she is the cause of not only the revelation of Being in its multiplicity, but, fur-

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11 See Van den Berg (2001, 254), Lewy (1978, 82–98), Johnston (1990, 49–75), Majeric (1992), and (2001), Brisson (2000, 139–143), (2003, 118–123) and (2004), for both a general understanding of the Chaldean Oracles as well as analysis of the feminine role, particularly the Rhea/Hecate mediation between the two Fathers. For other articles on gender in Proclus' system, see Layne (2021) and Schultz (2019) as well as Martijn in this volume. Furthermore, I will not be treating in this paper Proclus' explicit attitudes towards women and their capacities. Rather, we will be focusing on the structures that may or may not inform his responses to problems like Plato's stance on women as philosopher-kings in the *Republic* or his seemingly counter opinions of women in the *Timaeus* and other dialogues. See Baltzly (2013) as well as his article in this volume. For Damascius' reception of the virtues of women see Schultz in this volume.

12 Οὐ διαιρέσεως οὖν, ἀλλὰ κοινωνίας καὶ ἀδιακρίτου συναφῆς ἡ δύναμις ἦν αἰτία καὶ σχέσις τοῦ τε ἑνὸς πρὸς ⟨τὸ⟩ ὂν καὶ τοῦ ὄντος πρὸς τὸ ἕν. Ἀνάγκη τοίνυν μήτε κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν αὐτὴν τετάχθαι τὴν νοητὴν μήτε κατὰ τὴν ἑτερότητα τῶν ὄντων τὴν νοεράν, μέσην δὲ οὖσαν ἀμφοῖν ἀνάλογον μὲν ὑφεστάναι τῇ νοητῇ δυνάμει, γεννᾶν δὲ ἐν ἐσχάτοις τῶν νοερῶν καὶ τὴν θατέρου μοῖραν—τίνα δὴ οὖσαν αὐτὴν ἄλλην ἢ τὸ θῆλυ τὸ τῶν θεῶν;

ther, she brings into being both the connection between things as well as their perfection. Despite being the secondary cause of reality, i.e., Life as opposed to Being, the maternal as opposed to the paternal, she is ultimately not weaker or subordinated to any concrete father. In contradistinction to those discourses that would relegate the feminine to the ugly, to the subservient underbelly of the masculine that can be discarded once the Father is given his more perfect son, the feminine in Proclus' metaphysics is in fact the mediating summit of all the gods, the place *in which* they become their unique and differentiated selves, a summit that marks the between, the both/and that must be traversed if one is to have contact with the intelligible order at all. In this, she is the primary gatekeeper and cause of all mediation and it is she that paradigmatically leads all the varied and multiple order of the gods in their being, life and activity. Most notably for this paper, we shall concentrate on her influence over the paternal Demiurge who, as we shall see, must revert to her as the initial cause of his own ability to even see the intelligible paradigmatic cause, the Living Being itself, and therein create.

In order to understand this maternal cause in Proclus better, the following will examine his explicit identification of the summit of the intelligible-intellective sphere as feminine, showing that the first feminine deity in Proclus' system, the goddess Night, is the mother goddess that receives, reveals and mediates to the divine orders intelligible being and the good. In this, she, rather than he, acts as the first dyadic paradigm, both intelligible and intellective, instructing through her prophetic and connective powers how to unite and bring into contact all multiplicity. We shall thus see that the essential role of the feminine is not merely subordinate generative work but, rather, that it conditions all mediation, therein becoming a necessary and superior cause guiding the work of the Demiurge in his task of creation. Further, we shall see how Night's paradigmatic role problematizes Proclus' readings of other feminine orders, particularly in such "daughters" as the divine Mixing Bowl and Necessity, the mothers co-establishing the cosmos with the Demiurge. Overall, it will be shown that Proclus' system, while seemingly subordinating the feminine, eclipsing her for the sake of establishing the eternal reign of the Father-son, fails to suppress her completely. Rather, with all due respect, the Demiurge ends up looking quite needy, situated between the power of the mother(s) that precede(s) him as well as the women who stand alongside him, constituting the divinity of the world which, because of the maternal causes, looks much less like a son, a virile being produced by the Father, than a daughter, an erotic intercessor, mixed in her being, life and activity; the wonderous soul generating, perfecting and creating the good that touches us all.

1 Night's Birth and Abode

To summarize all of the orders of the gods in the intelligible realm the following chart my prove useful for understanding the essential role Night and the feminine plays in Proclus' theological metaphysics—the details of which will be unpacked over the course of this essay.

So, to unpack, in Proclus' *Commentary on the* Timaeus, the Neoplatonist leans on Orphic mythology to embolden his metaphysical schema and identifies six kings or ruling principles set in charge of the cosmos: Phanes, Night, Ouranos, Kronos, Zeus and Dionysus (*in Ti.* III 168, 19–20).[13] Interestingly, Night, the first and only feminine deity in this list, acts alongside Phanes as one of the primary leading causes (ἀρχηγικὰς αἰτίας) and is, as can be expected, assigned the maternal role over all that is demarcated as feminine in his system, while Phanes, despite being an androgynous or queer (both male and female/neither male nor female/more than male or female) god (cf. *in Ti.* I 429, 27–430, 1, *in Ti.* I 450, 23–26 and *Theol. Plat.* IV 81, 19–20) is set over all that is assigned to the paternal. As he writes:

> Consequently some say that he has left it to us to seek some of them by analogy with the two rulers in the heavens, I mean Phanes and Night. For it is necessary for those of a superior rank to act also among encosmic things, because even before the cosmos they lead the intellective gods, founded eternally in the impenetrable chamber of Phanes himself as Orpheus says, calling their secret unrevealing order an impenetrable chamber (ἄδυτον). So if one wants to enlist the rotation of the Same and of the Other to reveal them by analogy, as being male and female or paternal and generative (γεννητικόν), one would not miss the truth; and if [one wants to enlist] the sun and moon as juxtaposed powers among the planets, the sun will preserve its likeness to Phanes and the moon to Night. And if this is correct, as it seems to me, [one would not miss the truth] by making the one Demiurge of the universe stand in relation to Phanes the father, an intellect himself—for the theologian [says that even if the birth of the worlds is the job of this latter, it is the former's job to make them], just as this one is [father] of heaven and earth—and making the

13 See *in Ti.* III 168, 23–169, 1 for a description of the passing from one reign to another as well as the emphasis, following *Inst.* § 56, that each king can be found in all orders of reality that proceed from them. See also Syrianus, *in Metaph.* 182, 8–28. For more on Orphic mythology and its relation to Neoplatonism see Brisson (1987), (2000), and (2003); Graf and Johnston (2007); and Kotwick (2014).

TABLE 1 Proclus' theological metaphysics

Order of being	**Triadic divisions**	**Theological analogue (gender included)**		**Topological descriptors**	
Intelligible (Being)	Intelligible Being	Orphic Egg		Impenetrable Chamber	
	Intelligible Life	Orphic Tunic			
	Intelligible Intellect	Phanes (Queer)			
Intelligible-Intellective (Life)	Intelligible Intellective Being	Night (Feminine/Queer)	Night 1: Being (Masculine/Queer)	Supercelestial Place	Plain of Truth, w/out color and the seat of Wisdom
			Night 2: Life/Connection/Binding (Feminine/Queer)		The Meadow w/out figure, seat of Temperance
			Night 3: Perfection (Queer)		Nutriment, w/out touch, Ambrosia or Nectar and seat of Justice and Adrasteia
	Intelligible Intellective Life	Ouranos (Masculine)		Celestial Place	
	Intelligible Intellective Intellect	Hundred Handers (Queer)			
Intellective	Intellective Being	Kronos (Masculine)			
	Intellective Life	Rhea/Demeter[a] (Feminine)			
	Intellective Intellect	Demiurge/Zeus (Formal Principle/Masculine)	Hera/Mixing Bowl (Life-giving Principle/Feminine)[b]		
			Themis/Necessity (Perfective Principle/Feminine/Queer)		

a See section 3 for the identification of Rhea and Demeter.

b See section 3 for the role of Hera and Themis in Proclus' theological metaphysics.

> life-generating mixing bowl (τὸν δὲ κρατῆρα τὸν ζῳογόνον) [stand in relation to] Night who brings forth all life from the unseen along with Phanes, for the mixing bowl too gives birth to the entire soul for things within the cosmos. For it is better to conceive of both as prior to the cosmos, and to make the Demiurge analogous to Phanes, since he too is said to be assimilated to him in his act of universal creation, and to make the power that is in harness with him and brings forth the universe [analogous to] Night, who produces all things in obscure fashion (ἀφανῶς) from the father.
>
> *in Ti.* III 169, 15–170, 14, trans. BALTZLY[14]

As the Orphic progeny of Aether and Chaos, or the Neoplatonic principles of Limit and Unlimited, Phanes is heralded here and elsewhere as the primary paternal deity (see also *in Cra.* 48, 1–2) whose likeness is preserved in such overarching principles as Limit, Being, the creative act of the Demiurge or, at the level of the psychic, the rotation of the Same (cf. *in Ti.* I 220, 5–10). Most importantly, Phanes stands at the liminal border between the intelligible order and the intelligible-intellective as the intelligible intellect (*in Ti.* I 428, 10–12). At this vantage point, Phanes corresponds to Plato's Living-Thing-Itself embracing the reality of all things in a transcendent and ineffable manner.[15] As Proclus writes:

> This [Phanes], then, having made himself manifest from among the Hidden Gods (τῶν κρυφίων θεῶν), already contains within himself the causes

14 ἔνιοι μὲν οὖν φασιν, ὅτι τοὺς μὲν ἀνὰ λόγον τοῖς δύο βασιλεῦσιν ἐν οὐρανῷ καταλέλοιπε ζητεῖν, Φάνητι λέγω καὶ Νυκτί· δεῖ γὰρ αὐτοὺς ἐν ὑπερτέρᾳ τάξει ποιεῖν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐγκοσμίοις, διότι δὴ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ κόσμου τῶν νοερῶν ἡγοῦνται θεῶν, ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ διαιωνίως ἱδρυμένοι, καθά φησιν Ὀρφεύς, αὐτοῦ τοῦ Φάνητος, τὴν κρύφιον αὐτῶν τάξιν καὶ ἀνέκφαντον ἐκεῖνος ἄδυτον ἀποκαλῶν. εἴτε οὖν τὴν ταὐτοῦ περιφορὰν καὶ τὴν θατέρου τάττειν ⟨ἐθέλοι τις⟩ εἰς τὴν τούτων ἀναλογίαν ὡς ἄρρεν καὶ θῆλυ καὶ πατρικὸν καὶ γεννητικόν, οὐκ ἂν ἁμαρτάνοι τῆς ἀληθείας, εἴτε ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην ὡς ἐν τοῖς πλανωμένοις ἀντιθέτους, ὁ μὲν ἥλιος τὴν ὁμοιότητα [τὴν] πρὸς τὸν Φάνητα δια σώσει, ἡ δὲ σελήνη τὴν πρὸς τὴν Νύκτα. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο ἀληθές, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, [τὸν ἕν]α τῶν ὅλων δημιουργὸν ἀνάλογον ἱδρύσας τῷ πατρὶ [τῷ] Φάνητι νοερὸν … καὶ αὐτόν (καὶ γὰρ … ταύτης ἐστὶ τῶν κόσμων … ποιεῖν ὁ θεολόγος, ὥσπερ οὗτος τοῦ τε Οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς Γῆς). τὸν δὲ κρατῆρα τὸν ζῳογόνον τῇ Νυκτὶ τῇ πᾶσαν ἐκ τῶν ἀφανῶν παραγούσῃ ζωὴν μετὰ τοῦ Φάνητος, ὡς καὶ ὁ κρατὴρ πᾶσαν λοχεύει τοῖς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ψυχήν. Βέλτιον γὰρ ἄμφω πρὸ τοῦ κόσμου νοεῖν καὶ τὸν μὲν δημιουργὸν αὐτὸν ἀνὰ λόγον τῷ Φάνητι τάττειν, ἐπειδὴ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀφομοιοῦσθαι λέγεται κατὰ τὴν ποίησιν τῶν ὅλων, τὴν δὲ συνεζευγμένην αὐτῷ καὶ γεννητικὴν τῶν ὅλων δύναμιν τῇ Νυκτὶ ἀφανῶς τὰ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς προαγούσῃ.

15 Some of the research material for the origin and nature of Phanes' queerness can be found in Layne (2021).

> of [all] secondary orders—the creative, the sustaining, the originating, the perfective, the inflexible—and holds in his embrace in the form of a single cause all the intelligible living things [...].
>
> *in Ti.* I 428, 23–429, 4, trans. RUNIA and SHARE[16]

As the monad of every living thing, Phanes (sometimes referred to as Protogonos) is far from "gender neutral" as the Intelligible Living Being is marked by both maleness and femaleness, reflecting therein the mixture of limit and unlimitedness that can be found at all levels of reality, whether intellectual, vital or corporeal.

> [The Intelligible Living Being] includes both male and female simultaneously, for these [sexes] are present in every order of living thing in an appropriate manner—being present in one manner in gods, but in another in daemons and yet another among mortal beings—and it is necessary that the primary henads of these [sexes] pre-exist within the single comprehension of Living Thing. From this dyad [of male and female] come the four forms of living things so that as a result it has also been established as a tetrad [...] The single form, Living Being Itself, exists up there, and so too does the dyad, male and female.
>
> *in Ti.* III 106, 10–24, trans. BALTZLY[17]

Interestingly, the nature of the intelligible Living Being establishes that each procession, eventually including individual souls, queers the reality of a singular sex presentation in any individual, be it a god or mortal, insofar as each procession carries within it an image of the dyad of male and female. Emphasizing Phanes' necessary gender bending, Proclus appeals to several mythological frameworks including the Chaldean Oracles to accentuate Phanes' paradigmatic completeness and causal responsibility.

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16 οὗτος δὴ οὖν ἀπὸ τῶν κρυφίων θεῶν ἐκφήνας ἑαυτὸν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὰς τῶν δευτέρων τάξεων αἰτίας προείληφε, ποιητικῶν, συνοχικῶν, ἀρχικῶν, τελεσιουργῶν, ἀτρέπτων, καὶ κατὰ μίαν αἰτίαν πάντα τὰ νοητὰ ζῷα περιείληφεν [...].

17 καθὸ δὲ τοῦ τε ἄρρενός ἐστιν ἅμα καὶ τοῦ θήλεος περιεκτικόν, δυάς ἐστι· ταῦτα γὰρ ἐν πάσαις τάξεσι τῶν ζώων οἰκείως ἐστίν, ἄλλως μὲν ἐν θεοῖς, ἄλλως δὲ ἐν δαίμοσιν, ἄλλως δὲ ἐν θνητοῖς, καὶ δεῖ προάρχειν αὐτῶν τὰς πρώτας ἑνάδας ἐν τῇ μιᾷ τοῦ ζῴου περιοχῇ. καθὸ δὲ ἐκ τῆς δυάδος ταύτης τὰς τέτταρας ἐν ἑαυτῷ τῶν ζώων ἰδέας ὑπεστήσατο, τετράς· κατὰ γὰρ ταύτας τὰς ἰδέας ἡ τετραμερὴς δημιουργία προελήλυθε, καὶ ἡ πρώτη ποιητικὴ τῶν ὅλων αἰτία τετράς ἐστι. [...] ἔστι μὲν γὰρ ἐκεῖ καὶ ἡ μία ἰδέα, τὸ αὐτοζῷον, ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἡ δυάς, τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν [...]. See Layne (2021) as well as E. Butler (1993) on the insistence that Phanes, regardless of being deemed a paternal god, is both mother and father alike.

> This is why the Theologian fashions a most universal living thing, placing on it the heads of a ram, a bull, a lion and a serpent, and why both maleness and femaleness are first of all in it as being the first living thing—'female and begetter is the mighty god Erikepaios', says the Theologian (fr. 81 Kern)—and he was also the first to have wings.
>
> *in Ti.* I 429, 27–430, 1, trans. RUNIA and SHARE[18]

As the perfective limit of the intelligible order, Phanes holds within his being the totality of all things in a unified and absolute manner and is, therein, the cause of the paternal and maternal alike, giving birth to Night and her supercelestial and tripartite order. Stressing the completeness and therein the extent of Phanes' generative capacity in contrast to Zeus/the Demiurge, who must needs bear life with Hera, the mixing bowl and Themis/Necessity, Proclus writes:

> … but Phanes, in contrast, comes forth alone and, one and the same person, is celebrated in song as [both] 'female and begetter' (*Orphic fr.* 81 Kern) and brings forth the Nights, and as a father, has intercourse (σύνεστιν) with the middle one. 'For he himself plucked the virginal flower of his own child' (*Orphic fr.* 98 Kern). So, according to this theologian too, the All-complete Living Thing is not on the second level along with another but fills both the nocturnal and heavenly orders with its own all-ness.
>
> *in Ti.* I 450, 22–451, 1, trans. RUNIA and SHARE[19]

Emphasizing again the absolutely transcendent and unparticipated nature of Phanes, i.e. the intelligible intellect, and therein his paternal qualities, this account of the birth of the nocturnal and heavenly orders ultimately reinforces the mixed or queer/androgynous (vs. gender neutral) nature of the Intelligible

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18 διὸ καὶ ὁλικώτατον ζῷον ὁ θεολόγος ἀναπλάττει κριοῦ καὶ ταύρου καὶ λέοντος καὶ δράκοντος αὐτῷ περιτιθεὶς κεφαλάς, καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ πρώτῳ τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν ὡς ζῴῳ πρώτῳ· θῆλυς καὶ γενέτωρ κρατερὸς θεὸς Ἠρικεπαῖος, φησὶν ὁ θεολόγος· αὐτῷ δὲ καὶ αἱ πτέρυγες πρῶτον.

19 ὁ δέ γε Φάνης μόνος τε πρόεισι καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς ἀνυμνεῖται θῆλυς καὶ γενέτωρ, παράγει δὲ τὰς Νύκτας; καὶ τῇ μέσῃ σύνεστιν ὡς πατήρ. αὐτὸς γὰρ ἑῆς παιδὸς ἀφείλετο κούριον ἄνθος. καὶ κατὰ τοῦτον ἄρα τὸν θεολόγον τὸ παντελὲς ζῷον μεθ'ἑτέρου δεύτερον οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ πληροῖ μὲν τοὺς νυχίους διακόσμους, πληροῖ δὲ τοὺς οὐρανίους τῆς ἑαυτοῦ παντό τητος. For another reference to the triadic Nights, see *in Cra.* 48, 19. See Brisson (1987) who thinks that the Nights refer to Phanes' mother, sister and daughter. For a clear rejection of this view see Runia and Share (2008, 343n757). The following will side with Runia and Share, arguing that the three Nights correspond to the triad under the monad of Night that is expressed in the 1) plain of truth, 2) the nocturnal meadow and 3) the nutriment of the Gods expressed in the law of Adrasteia. Phanes copulates with the life-giving font that corresponds to the meadow of Night's order, i.e. intelligible-intellective being in its mode of life.

Living Thing, a mixture that will, as we shall discuss more later, constitute the Demiurge's need and dependency on maternal principles of procession and connection, relationships that do not mar his perfection but establish it.[20]

To return to Phanes, the primordial mixed deity, its foremost progeny is not a son, not a continuation of the 'same' typical of masculinist discourses. Rather, the first birth produces a daughter, Night, who, as we saw in the quote above, is primarily associated with the principle of the Unlimited, Generation, the life-giving Mixing Bowl, or, again at the level of the psychic, the rotation of the Other. Situated at the highest level of the intelligible-intellective order, Night's primary task is to make manifest the occult domain of the intelligible, i.e., the unparticipated and as such unknowable order, notably described by Proclus as the impenetrable chamber of Phanes. In short, Night is the deity that reigns at the supra-essential (*huperousios*) moment in the second triad of the intelligible-intellective and, as such, she reveals Being from and in relation to himself (cf. *Theol. Plat.* III 46, 20–22). As the summit of the intelligible-intellective, Night is the primary "gate-keeper" to the unknowable and ineffable Phanes. As Hermias writes,

> No eye looked upon Protogonos,
> But alone sacred Night: for all others
> Perceived in heaven [only] the desperate light
> irradiating from the immortal Phanes' skin.
>
> HERMIAS, *in Phdr.* II 155, 11 trans. LAYNE[21]

Likewise, for Proclus, Night alone (as intelligible-intellective being) is the sole mediator for the intelligible order, explicitly constituted as that which receives

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20 See E. Butler (2008) who cites *Theol. Plat.* III 28. 100, 4–11: "The intelligible genus of Gods transcends unitarily all the other divine orders [...] It transcends both universal and particular intelligibles and preexists all objects of intellection as an unparticipated and divine intelligible," and argues that "the intelligible class of Gods is structurally unlike other classes insofar as in its Being it is *unparticipated*. As such, the intelligible realm is itself not formally intelligible as it exhibits in a greater degree the property associated with the One." See *Theol. Plat.* III 28. 100. 4–11. This unparticipated intelligibility will therein demand mediation through the intelligible-intellective order causing Night to be the primary intelligible king insofar as her being as intelligible-intellective allows for the mediation of the intelligible. In conversation, Butler has argued that this suggests that Life, Intellect and Soul is the primary effective triad in our own lives, making the goddess Night the summit of our own powers of reversion wherein Soul is the intellect or perfective order of the triad beginning with the intelligible-intellective.

21 πρωτόγονόν γε μὲν οὔτις ἐσέδρακεν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν, εἰ μὴ Νὺξ ἱερὴ μούνη· τοὶ δ' ἄλλοι ἅπαντες θαύμαζον καθορῶντες ἐν αἰθέρι φέγγος ἄελπτον. τοῖον ἀπέστραπτε χροὸς ἀθανάτοιο Φάνητος.

all that is uniform and simple in the primary order. The nocturnal order therein becomes the place *in which* what was wholly transcendent and unparticipated is laid bare, she is the dark medium that both embraces the light in herself but also transports the light to secondary natures. Underscoring both the receptive and generative capacities of the primary maternal goddess, Proclus identifies her domain with the supercelestial place of the *Phaedrus*.[22] Qualifying that the supercelestial place is truly substantial existence (οὐσίαν τὴν ὄντως οὖσαν), i.e., not the intelligible itself but the intelligible in its absolute mode of life, Proclus assigns this order to the feminine insofar it reveals the power and activity of the manifold residing implicitly in the intelligible domain (*Theol. Plat.* IV 33, 1–5). He describes her lived being as follows:

> Hence also Plato calls it *being* (οὐσίαν), and being which *truly is* (ὄντως οὖσαν), as receiving this intelligible and substantial being according to that which is primarily being. And these intelligibles were paternal; for it subsists according to divine union and limit, and is the hidden and highest limit of all intelligibles. But that [viz. the supercelestial place] is maternal, subsisting according to the unlimited and the power there. For this class is feminine and prolific, and produces all things by intelligible powers. Hence also, Plato calls it *place* (τόπον), as the receptacle of the paternal causes and as bringing forth and leading the generative powers of the Gods onward to the constitution of secondary natures.
>
> *Theol. Plat.* IV 33, 9–21, trans. TAYLOR, slightly modified[23]

Interestingly, while relying on a heteronormative trope in which the masculine penetrates the feminine receptacle, Proclus contrasts this divine feminine with the femininity or darkness associated with passive matter. Subversively, Proclus utilizes language that explicitly invokes the *Timaeus*, describing the supercelestial place of Night as the "mother and nurse of the Gods" which "not only receives, but also constitutes and generates secondary natures,

22 While never explicitly demarcating the supercelestial place as the abode of Night, the identity is clear insofar as the intelligible-intellective Being is the domain prior to Ouranos and after Phanes. See also Hermais *in Phdr.* 156, 16 who appears to confirm the identity.

23 Διὸ καὶ οὐσίαν αὐτὴν καλεῖ καὶ ὄντως οὖσαν ὡς τὸ νοητὸν τοῦτο καὶ οὐσιῶδες κατὰ τὴν τοῦ πρώτως ὄντος οὐσίαν ὑποδεξαμένην. Καὶ ἐκείνη μὲν ἦν πατρική (κατὰ γὰρ τὴν ἕνωσιν τὴν θείαν καὶ τὸ πέρας ὑφέστηκεν, καὶ ἔστι πέρας τῶν νοητῶν πάντων τὸ κρύφιον καὶ τὸ ἀκρότατον) αὕτη δὲ μητρική, κατὰ τὴν ἀπειρίαν ὑποστᾶσα καὶ τὴν δύναμιν ἐκείνην. Θηλυπρεπὴς γάρ ἐστιν ἡ τάξις αὕτη καὶ γόνιμος καὶ δυνάμεσι νοηταῖς τὰ πάντα παράγουσα. Ὅθεν δὴ καὶ τόπον αὐτὴν ὁ Πλάτων ἐκάλεσεν ὡς ὑποδοχὴν τῶν πατρικῶν αἰτίων καὶ λοχεύουσαν καὶ προάγουσαν τὰς γεννητικὰς δυνάμεις τῶν θεῶν εἰς τὰς τῶν δευτέρων ὑποστάσεις.

together with the father."[24] This foremost maternal becomes for Proclus the intelligible τόπος and seat of the Gods, containing all that is prolific (γόνιμος), and primarily processive, revealing the power of the divine in its multiplicity.[25] To quote E. Butler, she is the original "gathering place or *agora* of the Gods."[26]

Yet, as the first monad of the intelligible-intellective, how is she able to do this; that is, as so closely associated with the intelligible how can she be the place of division? As Proclus asks: "… if indeed the supercelestial place is the unparticipated and hidden genus of the intelligible Gods, how can we establish so great a divine multitude there …?" (Theol. Plat. IV 22, 10–14). In other words, Proclus is concerned with how the supercelestial place of Night participates with the intelligible order, with that which is absolutely simple, whilst not herself being simple? Here, we should clarify that as substantial life, she is absolute relation, revealing in her order the movement implicit in Being itself, i.e. the intelligible life which in Being is undifferentiated and therein unintelligible to the lower orders. While in the feminine movement of Being, in the order of Life, she constitutes the relations in Being, the movements of Being. In her intelligible-intellective being, things actually move in their unique differentiation, establishing the intelligibility of the cycle of remaining, procession and reversion. In short, she reveals and guarantees the order of things in her own unified multiplicity. While explicitly subordinating her to the intelligible domain, Proclus also simultaneously establishes her as the summit of the intelligible and intellective gods. Proclus writes:

> […] possessing in itself a multitude of intelligibles, it will not be arranged according to the first [intelligible] triad; for the one being is there, and not the multitude of beings. But possessing a varied life, which is indicated by the *meadow*, it is subordinate to the second [triad] [i.e., Intelligible Life]; for intelligible life is one and without distinction. And again, since it shines forth with divided forms, classes of all sorts, and prolific powers, it falls short of the all-perfect triad [i.e., the third intelligible triad, Intelligible Intellect]. If therefore it is second to these in dignity and power, but

24 *Theol. Plat.* IV 34, 1–3: ἡ δὲ τῶν θεῶν μήτηρ καὶ τροφὸς οὐ δέχεται μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑφίστησι καὶ γεννᾷ τὰ δεύτερα μετὰ τοῦ πατρός. Strikingly, there is a parallel between this nurse and Earth, the planet, insofar as Proclus argues that she is our nurse insomuch as she perfects our souls and rouses our intellect in accordance with the intellect that belongs to her. *In Ti.* III 136, 20–25.

25 *Theol. Plat.* IV 33, 21–35, 7.

26 Butler (2010).

> is established above the celestial class [Ouranos], it is intelligible indeed, but the summit of the intellective Gods.
>
> *Theol. Plat.* IV 23, 21–24. 1, trans. TAYLOR, slightly modified[27]

Night's being is situated in intelligible-intellective being and, as such, the supercelestial and nocturnal order is established above the reign of Ouranos,[28] the *existing* or participated bond of the intelligible and intellective order. Here, it should be emphasized that Night, the maternal deity par excellence, and not Ouranos, will act as the original ruler over all of Life, both intellectual and psychic. Put otherwise, unlike the intellectually visible celestial order, Night as

27 Καὶ μὴν πλῆθος μὲν ἔχων ἐν ἑαυτῷ τῶν νοητῶν, οὐκ ἂν κατὰ τὴν πρώτην τάττοιτο τριάδα, τὸ γὰρ ἓν ὂν ἐκεῖ καὶ οὐ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ὄντων· ζωὴν δὲ ποικίλην ἔχων, ἣν ὁ λειμὼν ἐνδείκνυται, τῆς δευτέρας ἐστὶ καταδεέστερος (ἡ γὰρ νοητὴ ζωὴ μία καὶ ἀδιάκριτός ἐστιν). εἴδεσιν δὲ αὖ διῃρημένοις προλάμπων καὶ τάξεσι παντοίαις καὶ γονίμοις δυνάμεσι, τῆς παντελοῦς ἀπολείπεται τριάδος. Εἰ τοίνυν τούτων μέν ἐστι δεύτερος πρεσβείᾳ καὶ δυνάμει, τῆς δὲ οὐρανίας τάξεως ὑπερίδρυται, νοητὸς μέν ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ τῶν νοερῶν θεῶν ἀκρότης.

28 To clarify the domain of Ouranos, the premier progeny of Phanes and Night, he is the bond that ties intelligible-intellective being, Night, to intelligible-intellective intellect. His abode corresponds to the heavens between the supercelestial place and the subcelestial arch/vault. Ultimately, then, Ouranos is the *existing* bond while Night is the bond itself in its absolutely lived, versus wholly transcendent form, i.e., Intelligible Life. Proclus describes the order of the intelligible-intellective as vivific, connective and perfective, while reminding his readers that she, the vivific, holds sway over the connective Ouranos insofar as she, as summit, "reveals the symbols of the intelligibles and their ineffable union," (*Theol. Plat.* IV 26, 22–23). Furthermore, Proclus repeatedly and clearly regards the Heavens as being below the abode of Night but above the liminal space prior to the intellective sphere: "For each of these is taken according to their relation to the heaven; the one indeed primarily placed above it, the other primarily arranged under it," (*Theol. Plat.* IV 19, 3–5). Again: "The mighty Heaven, therefore, is allotted a sovereignty intermediary between that of the intelligibles and of the intellectives. For the *circulation* mentioned in the *Phaedrus* is intelligence, through which all the Gods and souls obtain the contemplation of intelligibles. But intelligence is between intellect and intelligible. It must be said therefore that the whole [universal] heaven is established according to this medium, and that it contains the one bond of the divine orders, being the father indeed of the intellective genus, but being generated from the kings prior to it, whom indeed it is said to *see*. But on one side of it the supercelestial place, and on the other the subcelestial arch are arranged," (*Theol. Plat.* IV 21, 25–22, 7). Further: "And if the supercelestial place is beyond the celestial circulation, while inferior to those intelligible triads, because it is more expanded (for it is the *plain* of truth, and not its *sanctuary*), and is divided according to the multitude of forms and possesses a variety of powers, and the *meadow* which is there not only nourishes souls, but is visible to them, the first intelligibles illuminating souls with ineffable union, but not knowing them through intelligence, it is doubtless necessary that the supercelestial place be between the intelligible nature and the celestial circulation" (*Theol. Plat.* IV 23, 5–15).

the summit of what is both intelligible and intellective is both closer to the intelligible order (*Inst.* 62), a product of fewer causes (*Inst.* 58) and hence less composite, while also being the cause of a greater number of effects (*Inst.* 60) insofar as she establishes the reality of life and intelligible movement. In short, the touch of the mother is superior to the reign of the celestial Father.

Moreover, as the daughter of the intelligible, Night is, like her cause, transcendent and unparticipated in her being and therein arcane and unknowable whilst also paradoxically the source of all that can be known, insofar as she is also intellective. As Proclus writes:

> For this class is intermediary between the intelligible Gods and the first intellective divine orders and constitutes the bond of the two. And it guards indeed the intellectives according to a uniform and unknown transcendence, but transmits the plenitudes of the intelligibles as far as to the last of things. It likewise elevates all things at once, according to one common union, as far as to the intelligible father, and generates and produces them as far as to matter.
>
> *Theol. Plat.* IV 38, 4–11, trans. TAYLOR, modified[29]

As a consequence of this dyadic being, of being both/and, she in her mediation of the undifferentiated and the complex, unity and multiplicity, being and intellect constitutes that which can be known. Insofar as she is both transcendent summit of the intelligible-intellective sphere as well as immanent bond to all lower levels of the intellectual orders she can be unfolded both negatively "through the unknown manner in which it transcends secondary natures" as well as positively "through its participation with first natures" (*Theol. Plat.* IV 38, 11–14). In other words, she can be known through what she is, concrete relation, and as such she can either be negatively understood in her relation to her inferior, the celestial sphere of Ouranos, as cause and condition of intelligible-intellective life, or positively unfolded in her relation to Phanes, the superior intelligible intellect. In this latter relationship she is viewed as that which is receptive, generative and mediating respectively, activities part and parcel of the intelligible order but without division and therein without relation.

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29 Ἐπεὶ καὶ ἔστιν ἡ τάξις αὕτη μέση τῶν τε νοητῶν θεῶν καὶ τῶν πρώτων νοερῶν θείων διακόσμων, καὶ συνέχει τὸν σύνδεσμον ἀμφοτέρων· καὶ φρουρεῖ μὲν τὰ νοερὰ κατὰ τὴν ἑνοειδῆ καὶ ἄγνωστον ὑπεροχήν, διαπορθμεύει δὲ τὰς τῶν νοητῶν πληρώσεις καὶ μέχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων. καὶ ὁμοῦ κατὰ μίαν ἕνωσιν κοινὴν ἀνάγει τὰ πάντα μέχρι τοῦ νοητοῦ πατρός, καὶ γεννᾷ καὶ προάγει μέχρι τῆς ὕλης.

So from the standpoint of her effects, Night is negatively portrayed as exempt from intelligible (as opposed to sensible) light, color and figure as she transcends these three attributes according to "causal excellence."

> For it imparts to color the participation of light from the intelligibles and illuminates figure with intellective limit and imposes union and continuity upon contact from on high; and it perfects all things by its power, things which are in contact through union, those that are figured, through participation of limit, and things which have color, through the illumination of light; and it draws all things upward and to itself ineffably and through intelligible symbols (συνθήμασιν) and fills them with unitary goods.
>
> *Theol. Plat.* IV 41, 6–14, trans. TAYLOR, slightly modified[30]

While not light, figure or touch herself, she is the cause or medium of intelligible light, figure and touch, the place in which the intelligibles are impressed and mediated, lighting the liminal borders of the Heavens, which constitutes its figuration, its internal movements and external border, simultaneously revealing the celestial order's contact or touch with both Phanes and the subcelestial realm of the Hundred-Handers. Hermias markedly describes this while describing Night's immediate activity that constitutes the premier connection between the intelligible and intellective.[31]

> For the Goddess is superior to certain orders, but below others; and as the first ⟨principle⟩ is superessential, so Night is supercelestial. Why, however, are souls not said to see Heaven, but to become situated in, and be *conjoined* with it; but are not *conjoined* with the natures above Heaven,

30 Καὶ γὰρ τῷ χρώματι τὴν τοῦ φωτὸς μετουσίαν ἐκ τῶν νοητῶν ἐνδίδωσιν καὶ τῷ σχήματι τὸ πέρας ἐπιλάμπει τὸ νοερὸν καὶ τῇ ἁφῇ τὴν ἕνωσιν καὶ τὴν συνέχειαν ἐπιτίθησιν ἄνωθεν. καὶ τελειοῖ πάντα κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν, τὰ μὲν ἁπτόμενα διὰ τῆς ἑνώσεως, τὰ δὲ σχηματιζόμενα διὰ τῆς τοῦ πέρατος μεταδόσεως, τὰ δὲ χρωννύμενα διὰ τῆς τοῦ φωτὸς ἐλλάμψεως· πάντα δὲ ἀρρήτως καὶ τοῖς νοητοῖς συνθήμασιν ἀνασπᾷ καὶ ἀνέλκει πρὸς ἑαυτὸν καὶ πληροῖ τῶν ἐνιαίων ἀγαθῶν.

31 Cf. *in Phdr.* II 155, 15–25: "Night and all the supercelestial place, being above Heaven which is visible, they are very properly said to be without color. For night also is opposed to day, because the latter is illuminated and colored. And through *the privation of color* indeed, Plato manifests that the place of the Nights is above the kingdom of Heaven; but through *the privation of figure*, that it is above the order of the Cyclops. For theology says that figure is first unfolded into light in these, and that the divinities, the Cyclops, are the first principles and causes of the figures which subsists everywhere. Hence theology says that they are *manual artificers*. For this triad is perfective of figures."

> but *see* them only? In answer to this, it may be said that it is necessary contact should exist, as far as to a certain thing. Why, therefore, as far as to this? Because neither are the Gods under Zeus said to be united to Phanes, but this is alone asserted of Zeus, and he is said to be united through Night as an intermediary.
>
> *in Phdr.* II 154, 16–23, trans. TAYLOR, slightly modified[32]

In this description as well as in Proclus she is nothing but the unified relation between the light, the figure and the contact, the relation that mediates and reveals a divine multitude. As such, she is bond itself that constitutes the heavens' absolute connective capacity, a capacity which reveals in its movements and relations, its figures and contacts, the darkness, the transcendence of supercelestial order that substantially causes divine relation between the intelligible and intellective. Again, she, rather than he, is the binding cause itself.

With regard to the positive descriptions of Night's order that reference her participation with the superior intelligible cause, Proclus follows his basic triadic structure of remaining, procession and return, the very movement of Being, by delineating the plain of truth, the meadow of life and the perfective nutriment of the Gods.[33] These positive descriptions, again, correspond to the relational being of Night from the perspective of the intelligible, from what is, therein constituting absolute existence in the supercelestial place.

The plain of truth is described as that which receives the intelligible impressions and illuminations. It is the original domain of all science, of "wisdom itself", revealing what *is* in its mediation with the primarily intelligible, evidencing her power to be united to "the intelligible father which does not proceed". Hermias confirms this description of the plain of truth and its connection with Night:

> For by truth here he signifies the whole order of the Nights; and the *plain of truth* (τὸ πεδίον ἀληθείας), which he afterwards speaks of, obscurely indicates these. Theologists likewise establish truth uniquely in that place.

32 ἐπειδὴ τινῶν μέν ἐστι τάξεων ὑπερτέρα ἡ θεός, τινῶν δὲ κοιλοτέρα, καὶ ὥσπερ τὸ πρῶτον ὑπερούσιον, οὕτω τοῦτο ὑπερουράνιον. Ἐζήτησα διὰ τί αἱ ψυχαὶ οὐ λέγονται ὁρᾶν οὐρανὸν ἀλλὰ γίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ συνάπτεσθαι αὐτῷ, τοῖς δὲ ὑπὲρ τὸν οὐρανὸν οὐκέτι συνάπτεσθαι ἀλλὰ ὁρᾶν μόνον. Πρὸς δὴ τοῦτο εἴρηται ὅτι δεῖ ἄχρι τινὸς εἶναι τὴν συναφήν. Διὰ τί δὲ ἄχρι τούτου; ὅτι δὴ οὐδὲ οἱ ὑπὸ τὸν Δία θεοὶ λέγονται ἑνοῦσθαι τῷ Φάνητι, ἀλλὰ μόνος ὁ Ζεύς, καὶ αὐτὸς διὰ μέσης τῆς Νυκτός.

33 For more information on the binding cause itself and for its explicit allusion to that which reveals the intelligible light, see *in Ti.* II 16, 15–17, 6. Cf. IV 18, 15–21.

> For Orpheus speaking about Night says, "She possesses ⟨the truth⟩ of the Gods," and "She was given divination wholly without deceit." She is also said to give oracles to the Gods.
>
> *in Phdr.* II 153, 26–154, 4, trans. TAYLOR, slightly modified[34]

Next, the nocturnal meadow (λειμών) is described as the "prolific power of life" that fosters all divine plurality and generation "for the meadows [...] are productive of all various forms and *logoi*, and bear water which is the symbol of vivification (καὶ τῆς ζωογονίας φέρουσι τὸ ὕδωρ σύμβολον)."[35] Due to this, Proclus argues that "temperance itself" flows from these fountains (πηγαὶ), suggestive of the fontal gods themselves, insofar as the virtue is communicative and causes a bond between extremes.

Finally, the nourishing cause of the gods (τρόφιμος τῶν θεῶν αἰτία) is deemed "a certain intelligible union" that constitutes the perfection and providential nature of the multiplicity of gods toward secondary natures while retaining an "immutable intellectual perception" of the primary natures (*Theol. Plat.* IV 46, 8–11). Distinguishing between the nourishing properties of nectar and ambrosia respectively, Proclus suggests that the unlimited and limiting powers of the gods nourish souls insofar as they lead a multitude to order. Described as "justice itself", this nourishing order, revealing the immutable and pervasive powers of the divine, becomes the source of the perfective good that providentially binds all of creation. Summarizing these three orders and their virtues as the domains of intelligible plenitude, fecundity and perfection, Proclus writes of the three monads:

> [...] if science pertains to the first ⟨monad⟩, temperance to the second and justice to the third, from these things the triad will be perfectly apparent. And does not science, which is the stable and the uniform intelligence of universals/wholes, and which is consubsistent with intelligibles, pertain to that which is united to the intelligible father, and which does not proceed, nor separate its union from that divinity? But does not the genus of justice pertain to the power which is divided, distinguishes the

34 τὴν γὰρ ἀλήθειαν τὴν τῶν Νυκτῶν πᾶσαν τάξιν φασί, καὶ τὸ *πεδίον ἀληθείας* ἐξῆς ἐὰν λέγῃ, ταύτας αἰνίττεται· καὶ ἰδίως δὲ ἀλήθειαν οἱ θεολόγοι ἐκεῖ ἱδρύουσιν. Ὁ γάρ τοι Ὀρφεὺς περὶ τῆς Νυκτὸς λέγων *θεῶν γὰρ ἔχει*⟨...⟩ φησὶ καί· *μαντοσύνην δ'* [ε] *οἱ δῶκεν ἔχειν ἀψευδέα πάντῃ*. Καὶ αὕτη λέγεται μαντεύειν τοῖς θεοῖς.

35 *Theol. Plat.* IV 46, 4–6. Cf. Hermias, *in Phdr.* II 168, 8: "And *the meadow* is the prolific power of forms. The meadow also may be said to be the Nights: for there the fountains of life are contained." Λειμὼν δέ ἐστιν ἡ γόνιμος τῶν εἰδῶν δύναμις. λέγοι δ' ἂν λειμῶνα τὰς Νύκτας. ἐκεῖ γὰρ αἱ πηγαὶ τῆς ζωῆς.

> intellective genera, leads the intelligible multitude into order, and imparts by illumination distribution according to desert? And does not that of temperance pertain to that which is the intermediary of both these, which reverts upon itself, and possesses the common bond of this triad? For the harmonious and the communion with extremes according to reason are the special good of this ⟨power⟩.[36]

So at the summit of the intelligible-intellective we have absolute wisdom that remains in the intelligible Phanes, the Father who was also mother, joined to his daughter who is also, like him, paternal, mirroring each other in their mixed, generative and transcendent intelligibility.[37] At its liminal border to the celestial order we have justice, the order and distribution of the gods, the powers that will constitute the providential distribution of the divine in all things. Most importantly, between them is temperance, the virtue of the holding together, that which binds (σύνδεσμος) the being and power of the divine into concrete relation. Indeed, this binding is what is constitutive of Night and, as such, it may make more sense why Proclus described Phanes as consorting with the "middle" sister (recall *In Tim.* I 450, 22–451, 1), for generation into the celestial orders requires that the intelligible be joined in communicative contact, be in concrete lived relation. Ultimately, she is a dynamic living cause penetrating secondary orders, an activity that characterizes the nocturnal supercelestial order as feminine, troubling in its causal and extensive power Proclus' discourses that insist on the subservience of feminine power. As Proclus reinforces:

> It is evident therefore, from what has been said, that the supercelestial place is intelligible, and after what manner it is intelligible. In addition to these things also it is evident how it is feminine, for place is adapted to the

36 Εἰ δὲ καὶ ἐπιστήμη μὲν προσήκει τῇ πρώτῃ, σωφροσύνη δὲ τῇ δευτέρᾳ, δικαιοσύνη δὲ τῇ τρίτῃ, πάντως καὶ ἐκ τούτων ἡ τριὰς ἀναφαίνεται. Πῶς δὲ οὐχὶ προσήκει τῇ μὲν ἡνωμένῃ τῷ νοητῷ πατρὶ καὶ μὴ προελθούσῃ μηδὲ διελούσῃ τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἕνωσιν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκείνου θεότητος ἡ ἐπιστήμη, μόνιμος οὖσα καὶ ἑνοειδὴς νόησις τῶν ὅλων καὶ ὁμοῦ συνυπάρχουσα τοῖς νοητοῖς; Τῇ δὲ διῃρημένῃ δυνάμει καὶ τῇ διακρινούσῃ τὰ νοερὰ γένη καὶ εἰς τάξιν τὸ πλῆθος τὸ νοητὸν ἀγούσῃ καὶ τὴν κατ' ἀξίαν διανομὴν ἐπιλαμπούσῃ τὸ τῆς δικαιοσύνης γένος; Τῇ δὲ μέσῃ τούτων ἀμφοτέρων πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἐπεστραμμένῃ καὶ τὸν κοινὸν σύνδεσμον τῆς τριάδος ταύτης ἐχούσῃ τὸ τῆς σωφροσύνης; Τὸ γὰρ ἐναρμόνιον καὶ τὸ κατὰ λόγον ἐπικοινωνεῖν πρὸς τὰ ἄκρα ταύτης ἐστὶν ἐξαίρετον ἀγαθόν.

37 See *Theol. Plat.* IV 82, 5–11 for Night's own gender-bending insofar as all the monads in this order are paternal (not Fathers but in the mode of being in a triadic structure analogous to being-life-intellect) in the sense that they participate in the intelligible cause but according to the power of difference, i.e. the maternal, thus becoming binding or connective causes.

> generative Gods through the above mentioned causes. And the meadow is the fountain of a vivific nature, as will shortly be demonstrated. Socrates likewise posits all the divine natures that are in this place to be of this kind [i.e., feminine]. I mean science, justice, temperance, truth, [these all being grammatically feminine] and Adrasteia; which may especially be considered as a certain indication that Plato particularly attributes the feminine to this order, and not only other theologists.
>
> *Theol. Plat.* IV 34, 27–35, 10, trans. TAYLOR, slightly modified[38]

It is here that we begin to see Night's paradigmatic influence over other goddesses, her kinship and relationship to gods in the intellective, hypercosmic and encosmic alike, particularly in this passage the providential activity of Adrasteia, the mother of Necessity. For Proclus, Adrasteia is that which resides at the liminal border between the supercelestial place and the celestial place and as such imparts the illumination of that which is contained in Night, preserving thereby the law/justice of connection and communion that constitutes the providential bond existing in all things. In short, Adrasteia is the goddess that communicates and reinforces the procession of divine law that constitutes the movement of all things from first to last, again establishing her over and above both maternal and paternal deities in both the intellective and hyperencosmic orders. Proclus writes:

> [Adrasteia] rules over all the divine laws uniformly, from on high as far as to the last of things. It likewise binds to the one law of itself the whole of the laws, whether intellective, hypercosmic or encosmic. [...] Of all these the law of Adrasteia is connective according to one intelligible simplicity, and imparts being to all of them at once, and the measures of power.
>
> *Theol. Plat.* IV 51, 14–52, 1 trans. TAYLOR, slightly modified[39]

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38 Δῆλον τοίνυν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὅτι τε νοητός ἐστιν ὁ ὑπερουράνιος τόπος, καὶ ὅπως δὴ νοητός· καὶ πρὸς τούτοις, ὅπως θηλυπρεπής. Καὶ γὰρ ὁ τόπος τοῖς γεννητικοῖς προσήκει θεοῖς διὰ τὰς εἰρημένας αἰτίας· καὶ ὁ λειμὼν πηγὴ τῆς ζωογόνου φύσεώς ἐστιν, ὡς μικρὸν ὕστερον δειχθήσεται· καὶ πάντα ὁ Σωκράτης τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ θεῖα τοιαῦτα παραλαμβάνει, τὴν ἐπιστήμην, τὴν δικαιοσύνην, τὴν σωφροσύνην, τὴν ἀλήθειαν αὐτήν, τὴν Ἀδράστειαν, ὃ δὴ καὶ μάλιστα τεκμήριον ἄν τις ποιήσαιτο τοῦ καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα τὸ θῆλυ τῇ τάξει ταύτῃ διαφερόντως ἀπονέμειν, καὶ οὐ τοὺς ἄλλους μόνον θεολόγους.

39 πάντων δὲ τῶν θείων νόμων ἐπικρατεῖ μονοειδῶς ἄνωθεν ἄχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων· καὶ τοὺς θεσμοὺς ὅλους τούς τε νοεροὺς καὶ τοὺς ὑπερκοσμίους καὶ τοὺς ἐγκοσμίους εἰς ἕνα τὸν ἑαυτῆς ἀνεδήσατο θεσμόν, [...] ἐστι συνεκτικός, ὁμοῦ καὶ τὸ εἶναι πᾶσιν αὐτοῖς καὶ τὰ μέτρα τῆςδυνάμεως χορηγῶν.

As "that which nothing can escape," not even the gods, Night's guardian, Adrasteia, preserves justice, the providential order inherent in all of reality. Consequently, both Hermias and Proclus describe her as not passively seated merely observing the adherence to the law. Rather, she is actively banging brazen drumsticks whose sound is so "loud a sound as to cause all the Gods to revert upon herself."[40]

To make a preliminary conclusion based on this system, Night or the feminine domain of intelligible-intellective being is the source of concrete wisdom, connective life/temperance and perfective justice, all of which will become part and parcel of the coming-into-being of the cosmos and find their seat in the maternal order. Having outlined Night's fundamental role in Proclus' theological metaphysics, the rest of the paper will concentrate on those important moments in Proclus' texts where, despite his belief that the feminine is subservient to the masculine, he advances feminine deities that possess a power not reserved to the Father/Demiurgic creator. In other words, instead of focusing on how Proclus depreciates the value of the feminine, we shall now see how he valorizes and uplifts the feminine, showing how even the Demiurge needs his mother and her daughters insofar as they mirror the original power of Night.

2 Night and the Demiurge

In order to reinforce the Demiurgic need of Night and other feminine deities, it should be stressed that Proclus repeats the oracular advice of Night to the demiurgic Zeus over half a dozen times in his commentary on the *Timaeus* as well as that on the *Cratylus*.[41] Each instance reinforces the idea that Night constitutes the Demiurgic ability to create a lived cosmos that while multiple and generative is still bound or connected to all things. While explaining how Timaeus imitates the Demiurge in his account of the coming-into-being of the cosmos, Proclus writes of the Demiurge's reversion to mother Night:

> [The Demiurge] before undertaking the entire creative task is said to enter the oracular shrine of Night to fill himself with divine thoughts from there, to receive the principles of the creative task and, if it is permissible to speak thus, to resolve all difficulties and above all to encourage his

40 *Theol. Plat.* IV 52, 19–22. Cf. Hermias, *in Phdr.* II 168, 25–169, 25.

41 See *in Tim.* I 206, 28–207, 20, I 314, 1–25, I 315, 14, I 324, 26, II 24, 25–31, II 256, 20 and III 102, 1–6 for explicit reference to this advice. See Layne (2016) for further discussion of these passages in relation to Proclus' theory of prayer.

> father [Kronos] to collaborate with him in the creative task. This is what he is recorded as saying by the Theologian in his poem: *Mother, supreme among the gods, immortal Night, how, tell me,/ How should I establish a resolute beginning for the immortals?* And from her he hears: *Surround all things with unutterable ether, and in the middle place heaven*. And he is then instructed about the remainder of the creative work.
>
> *in Ti.* I 206, 28–207, 20, trans. RUNIA and SHARE; cf. Orphic frag. 164, 165, 155 and I.2, KERN[42]

Here, we should note that Zeus, the Demiurge, is described as entering the oracular shrine of Night—indeed, an image of penetration into the feminine but a subversive reimagining of such penetration insofar as the role of insemination is reversed. Night, as participating in Phanes, becomes like Phanes, but in her own intelligible-intellective mode, and spreads intelligible seed. Put otherwise, she is not only receptive as the place or seat of the gods, but also, becoming more like her cause, composes herself as an intelligible intellect that disseminates what is immanent, undifferentiated and simple in her to more complexity in lower levels of reality. In other words, Night treats the Demiurge as a receptacle of her own relational power. This power of Night to impress Zeus with her own connective or binding being is further invoked when Zeus/the Demiurge asks Night a particularly stunning question just before embarking on his creative task. "How will all things be one for me and also each separate from the other?" (πῶς δέ μοι ἕν τε τὰ πάντ' ἔσται καὶ χωρὶς ἕκαστον;) (*in Ti.* I 314, 4–5, cf. 207, 4–8). Night responds by insisting that the Demiurge establish a great bond (δεσμός), a golden chain of likeness, from first to last things and, as such, Night's counsel and the Demiurge's image of it in creating a world of proportion is venerated as the source of friendship and love which engenders "sympathy and the harmony of opposites" (*in Ti.* II 53, 26).[43]

Overall, Night as the summit of all binding causes[44] mediates all bonds below her, establishing and securing the communicative likeness between

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42 ὃς πρὸ τῆς ὅλης δημιουργίας εἴς τε τὸ χρηστήριον εἰσιέναι λέγεται τῆς Νυκτὸς κἀκεῖθεν πληροῦσθαι τῶν θείων νοήσεων καὶ τὰς τῆς δημιουργίας ἀρχὰς ὑποδέχεσθαι καὶ τὰς ἀπορίας ἁπάσας, εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν, διαλύειν καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸν πατέρα παρακαλεῖν εἰς τὴν τῆς δημιουργίας σύλληψιν. πρὸς μὲν γὰρ τὴν Νύκτα τῷ θεολόγῳ πεποίηται λέγων. μαῖα, θεῶν ὑπάτη, Νὺξ ἄμβροτε, πῶς, τάδε φράζε, πῶς χρή μ' ἀθανάτων ἀρχὴν κρατερόφρονα θέσθαι; καὶ ἀκούει παρ'αὐτῆς· αἰθέρι πάντα πέριξ ἀφάτῳ λάβε, τῷ δ' ἐνὶ μέσσῳ οὐρανόν. καὶ περὶ πάσης ἑξῆς ἀναδιδάσκεται τῆς κοσμοποιίας.

43 See also *in Ti.* II 53, 14–25.

44 See *in Ti.* II 24, 19–29, where Proclus repeats the three types of bond in the cosmos—1) the kind inherent in things that have the same quality; 2) the kind that is transcendent and is

Phanes and the Demiurge. As Proclus writes, "[f]or this reason too Zeus is united with him [Phanes] through the mediation of Night and when he has been filled from that source he becomes the Intelligible cosmos inasmuch as is possible in the Intellective realm" (*in Ti.* I 324, 20–29, trans. Runia and Share). In short, it is Night's absolute prophetic wisdom that institutes Zeus' ability to come into contact with an intelligible god insofar as his immediate Father and the summit of the intellective sphere, Kronos, is intelligible with respect to his effects,[45] and as such, Zeus will need Night's paradigmatic assistance in showing him how to come into contact with that which is beyond contact. In this, Kronos becomes analogous to Phanes as Night and the Demiurge express their own likeness. Zeus must internalize the activities conditioning his own being, the kings prior to him, beginning with Kronos, the first intellective god who is also described as having been "nurtured by Night"[46] while also preserving their singularity and his own. Proclus describes this internalization of one's causes as Zeus ingesting Kronos, enclosing the intelligible cosmos that preceded and constituted him.[47]

> Now while Plato says that [the Demiurge] 'leapt upon' and 'ingested' [the intelligible]—that is, after Night showed [him how to], for since Night is simultaneously intelligible and intellectual, the intellectual intellect is connected to the intelligible. […] [I]t is due to this fact that he is said to ingest this intelligible god as we have said since he is himself intellectual according to the Theologians insofar as he is unified [with the intelligible] by this [act of ingestion].
>
> *in Ti.* III 102, 1–5 trans. BALTZLY[48]

Here, the Demiurge, as dependent on all that precedes him, is explicitly internalizing the activity of Night, internalizing her contact with the intelligible, a contact that did not taint Phanes or make Phanes otherwise than intelligible

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cause of all things; and 3) the kind which connects the transcendent and the immanent—before explicitly invoking the essential life of the intelligible-intellective order, Night, as that which establishes the Demiurgic creative capacity to link things with the golden chain.

45 See Brisson (2004) for more information on Kronos' role in Orphic literature.

46 *in Cra.* 62, 10–13.

47 See also *in Cra.* 28, 4–9.

48 καὶ ὁ μὲν Πλάτων ὁρᾶν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ αὐτοζῷον εἶπεν, ὁ δὲ Ὀρφεὺς καὶ ἐπιπηδᾶν αὐτῷ καὶ καταπίνειν δειξάσης μέντοι τῆς Νυκτός· ἀπὸ γὰρ ταύτης νοητῆς οὔσης ἅμα καὶ νοερᾶς ὁ νοερὸς νοῦς συνάπτεται πρὸς τὸ νοητόν. […] διὸ καὶ καταπίνειν λέγεται τὸν νοητόν, ὡς εἴπομεν ἐκεῖνον θεὸν αὐτὸς νοερὸς ὢν παρὰ τοῖς θεολόγοις ὡς ἑνούμενος τούτῳ,

intellect, as contact with her might implicate. She, as dyadic, that is, as both intelligible and intelligible-intellective, constitutes the touch that binds all to Phanes' simplicity, internalizing him in her being, but in her act dividing herself so as to constitute the reality of divine multiplicity, assisting the queer principle in maintaining its transcendence. So too, the Demiurge, internalizing Kronos through Night's mediation, is able to touch and respond to Kronos and the kings before him, including both intelligible Phanes and intelligible-intellective Night, not drawing them down to the level of intellective intellect as that would make them otherwise than their being. Rather, the Demiurge ascends in becoming like "as far as possible" for the intellective to unite with these two paradigmatic and leading causes as both being and being-in-relation, as both Father and Maker of the sensible living thing.

3 The Mixing Bowl and Necessity

Having established the Demiurge's dependence on the maternal before him, we should now turn to his dependence on the maternal more proximate to him as well as the maternal alongside him. Insofar as the Demiurge has internalized Phanes, consumed him by binding and enclosing Kronos through the mediation of Night, the creative god must needs create but, unlike Phanes who is both father and mother, the Demiurge will not create/generate alone. Rather, he must create/generate with what is like him but also other to him.

> Now, this Demiurge does generate and activate soul by means of the mixing bowl (41d4), but by himself he generates intellect (30b4). Thus he is none other than the third of the Intellective fathers, for the task that distinguishes him is that of creating intellect, not that of making the body. Indeed, he does not make body on his own but does so together with Necessity, making it by means of the latter. The task of creating soul is also not especially his, for he generates the soul together with the mixing bowl. The task that he does alone is to supply intellect to the universe and establish it there.
>
> *in Ti.* I 311, 17–25, trans. RUNIA and SHARE[49]

49 νῦν δὲ οὗτος ψυχὴν μὲν γεννῶν ἐνεργεῖ μετὰ τοῦ κρατῆρος, νοῦν δὲ καθ' ἑαυτόν· οὐκ ἄλλος ἄρα ἐστὶν ἢ ὁ τρίτος τῶν νοερῶν πατέρων· τὸ γὰρ ἐξαίρετον ἔργον αὐτοῦ τὸ νοοποιόν ἐστιν, ἀλλ' οὐ τὸ σωματουργόν· τὸ γὰρ σῶμα οὐ μόνος, ἀλλὰ μετὰ τῆς ἀνάγκης ποιεῖ, δι' αὐτῆς ποιῶν· οὐδὲ τὸ ψυχοποιόν· τὴν γὰρ ψυχὴν μετὰ τοῦ κρατῆρος γεννᾷ· μόνος δὲ τὸν νοῦν καὶ ὑφίστησι καὶ ἐφίστησι τῷ παντί.

As primarily intellective, the mixing bowl and Necessity will come to assist the Demiurge in establishing soul and body respectively. The mixing bowl, as co-arranger (*Theol. Plat.* v 114, 15), is the cause of all psychic life and as such souls owe their own erotic being and power to her, as constituting their life but also their receptivity to the divine (*Theol. Plat.* v 114, 19). In this, souls reveal they have their source in the divine feminine, resembling her in her receptive/life-giving capacity, hence being open to the Gods and their movements in our lives.[50] To be sure, the mixing bowl's proximate cause is Life-Giving Rhea, i.e., intellective life who stands betwixt Kronos and Zeus (*Theol. Plat.* v 36, 12–17 and 37, 1–2). Heralded as Mother of the Gods, she, like Night, who yields the intellectual orders of the divine, produces all the gods at the level of both the hypercosmic and encosmic orders, and, perhaps more substantially, is conceived of in terms of Night's meadow or the second triad of the vivific.[51] Furthermore, in his commentary on Plato's *Cratylus* Proclus separates Rhea in her being from Rhea in her activity wherein she is identified with Demeter.[52] Here Demeter is described as filling the heavens with perfect life, revealing the Demiurgic intellect and instilling in him the capacity to create life while further emphasizing her intellective nature by insisting that she brings forth the third triad of Night, the nutriment of the Gods.[53] Invoking Night and her nutriment of both the limited and unlimited powers of the gods, i.e. nectar and ambrosia, in his descriptions of Demeter, Proclus writes:

> Demeter, just as she pours forth all life, so too pours forth all nourishment. And for this she has Night as a model, who is called "the immortal nurse of gods" (*Orphic fr.* 106); but Night is so on the intelligible level. For, according to the Oracle, the intelligible is nourishment for the intellectual

50 See *in Ti.* III 7, 23–26 where we are called to make our souls "aptly disposed to be a receptacle for those things that are good for us …".

51 See *Theol. Plat.* v 38, 14–26 (trans. Taylor, modified): "[S]he is both uniform and multiform, and though one and simple and self-perfect, she is a vivific world, proceeding from on high as far as to the last of things, giving subsistence to the vivific powers from the plane of life to the things at the end. Hence also Plato refers the vivific cause of wholes to this ⟨Goddess⟩, and through the last gifts of this divinity, indicates her whole activity, which primarily indeed fills the universal demiurge with intellective and prolific power, but secondarily perfects all the genera of the Gods with her intellective fruits. According to a third order also, she nourishes the souls that are the attendants of the Gods with the channels of divine perfection. And in the last ⟨orders⟩, she imparts to mortal animals the gift of nature."

52 See *in Cra.* 90, 26–92, 25.

53 *in Cra.* 91, 13–15.

> orders of the gods (*Or. Chald.* 17). It was Demeter who first distributed the two types of nourishment to the gods.
>
> *in Cra.*, 92, 9–92, 15, trans. DUVICK[54]

Proclus ultimately suggests that Demeter is more than a generative god but she, like Night, is the source of "the perfection of life from beings above all the way to the last ones." (*in Cra.* 92, 19–20)

So as we can already gather, Night's extension is not simply through her life-giving, i.e., the meadow where the font of communicative and connective temperance flows,[55] but also in what she provides. In this we should emphasize that Night's processive and mediating influence is extensive and wide-ranging but is especially pronounced, as we saw, in the goddess of order and law, Adrasteia, as well as in her own progeny, namely Themis and the Fates/Moirai. Consequently, she "causes Law to be enthroned beside [the Demiurge]."[56] Commenting on the Demiurge's second speech to the young gods, Proclus distinguishes between the words of the creator that establish the domains of providence and of fate, describing the maternal lineage of Night's guardian, Adrasteia:

> [...] Plato is establishing these three causes of order next to one another [as a sequence]: Adrasteia, Necessity, Fate: the intellective cause, the hypercosmic cause, and the encosmic cause. For the Demiurge too, as Orpheus says, receives nourishment from Adrasteia, consorts with Necessity and generates Fate.
>
> *in Ti.* III 274, 16–18, trans. TARRANT[57]

Adrasteia, again described as the source of nourishment, corresponding to the third moment of the order of Night, embraces all the laws that determine the providential activity of the divine which at the level of the hypercosmic cooperate, along with the mixing bowl, with the Demiurge. In this, Themis (explicitly identified with Ἀνάγκη or Necessity at *in Ti.* I 397, 10) keeps the order of the cosmos immutable and unshaken, preserving "the resemblances of the secondary

54 Ὅτι ἡ Δημήτηρ, ὥσπερ πᾶσαν ζωὴν προχέει, οὕτως καὶ πᾶσαν τροφήν· ἔχει δὲ παράδειγμα τὴν Νύκτα (θεῶν γὰρ τροφὸς ἀμβροσίη Νὺξ λέγεται) ἀλλ' ἐκείνη μὲν νοητῶς· καὶ γὰρ τροφὴ τὸ νοητόν ἐστιν κατὰ τὸ λόγιον ταῖς νοεραῖς διακοσμήσεσι τῶν θεῶν. ἡ δὲ Δημήτηρ πρώτη καὶ τὰς διττὰς τροφὰς διεῖλεν ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς [...].

55 For more on this see Layne (2021), and Baltzly in this volume.

56 *In Ti.* II 315, 13–15. See also *In Ti.* II 53, 21–25.

57 τρεῖς ταύτας τάξεως αἰτίας ἐφεξῆς ἀλλήλαις ὁ Πλάτων τίθησιν, Ἀδράστειαν, Ἀνάγκην, Εἱμαρμένην, τὴν νοεράν, τὴν ὑπερκόσμιον, τὴν ἐγκόσμιον· καὶ γὰρ ὁ δημιουργός, ὡς ὁ Ὀρφεύς φησι, τρέφεται μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀδραστείας, σύνεστι δὲ τῇ Ἀνάγκῃ, γεννᾷ δὲ τὴν Εἱμαρμένην.

[entities] to the primary" (*in Ti.* I 397, 25–26).[58] Unpacking why Timaeus valorized Themis, a.k.a. the Necessity of Plato's *Republic*, in his own likely story, Proclus further explains:

> We say that Necessity, who is called the mother of the Fates, subsists first in the intellective Gods, analogous to the intelligible and intellective monad of Adrasteia, and that from there manifesting in the principial orders, she generates this triad of the Fates. For that which is universal in providence and which entrains wholes, prior to activity, by its very being, is of ⟨the nature of⟩ intellective transcendence; and to extend production impartibly to all things is equivalent to demiurgic dominion. And this Goddess appears to me to illuminate all the progeny of the demiurge with an ineffable guard.
>
> *Theol. Plat.* VI 102, 7–19, trans. TAYLOR, modified[59]

Like her mother, Adrasteia, Necessity guards the providential bond that threads all things together, connecting and sustaining the life of the sensible cosmos. As the transcendent but also immanent monad of the providential order, she distributes her power to the activities of her dutiful daughters, the Moirai, who, as the triadic reflection of their mother, embrace all the encosmic laws that are inscribed in souls, so that individual souls may "discern what is appropriate for themselves with respect to their choice of lives."[60] In this, the Fates, far from simply being the handmaidens of Demiurgic providence, are direct images of

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58 Regarding the connection of Zeus' consort Themis to the Oracles of Night, see *in Ti.* I 396, 29–397, 13 (trans. Runia and Share): "Themis is appropriately included among the principles of the creation. It is she who is responsible for the demiurgic ordinances (*thesmoi*) and thanks to her the order of the universe was indissolubly framed. For this reason she remains a virgin prior to the procession of the Demiurge, [or], according to the oracles of Night […]." See also *in Ti.* I 397, 22–398, 3.

59 Τὴν μὲν τοίνυν Ἀνάγκην, μητέρα τῶν Μοιρῶν λεγομένην, ἐν τοῖς νοεροῖς θεοῖς τὴν πρώτην ὑποστῆναί φαμεν ἀνάλογον τῇ τῆς Ἀδραστείας νοητῇ καὶ νοερᾷ μονάδι, κἀκεῖθεν ἐν τοῖς ἀρχικοῖς διακόσμοις ἐκφανεῖσαν ἀπογεννῆσαι τὴν τριάδα τῶν Μοιρῶν ταύτην. Τὸ γὰρ ὁλικὸν ἐν τῇ προνοίᾳ καὶ τὸ πρὸ τοῦ ἐνεργεῖν αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι τὰ ὅλα περιάγον τῆς νοερᾶς ἐστιν ὑπεροχῆς καὶ τὸ διατείνειν ἀμερίστως ἐπὶ πάντα τὴν ποίησιν συνεξισοῦται πρὸς τὴν δημιουργικὴνἐπιστασίαν. Καί μοι δοκεῖ τὴν ἄρρητον φρουρὰν ἐπιλάμπειν ἅπασι τοῖς τοῦ δημιουργοῦ γεννήμασιν ἡ θεὸς αὕτη […]. See also I 329, 33–330, 3: "For this reason he placed the (goddess) Themis at the head of his account. She gathers the [cosmic] gods themselves for the Demiurge and does not allow them to be wrenched away from the goodness of the Father, so that thanks to Themis [Plato] too will not ascribe anything disharmonious or blasphemous to the Demiurge of the universe," (trans. Runia and Share).

60 *in Ti.* III 274, 23–26. See also *in Ti.* III 18, 5–10.

the nutriment of Night. They are the hands of justice that literally stitch into our souls the divine ordinances of Necessity.[61] Overall, the Fates secure "all the variety of powers in the world, the infinity of motions, and the multiform differences of reasons" (*Theol. Plat.* VI 100, 20–21), both "touching and not touching" that which is below, being both transcendent to our affairs while also being the immanent stitch that constitutes the beauty of our embodied life. Ultimately, these daughters of necessity, while being both frightful insofar as they seem to enslave souls to their bodies, to their sensible lot, are also their gate-keepers to recognizing the providential activity of their mother, and it is in this that we, once again, see the power of the feminine to be both/and, to be erotic intercessors in concrete lives.

To close on a speculative note, it is by virtue of being the progeny of a variety of causes, from not merely the Demiurgic Father but also the mixing bowl and Necessity, that the Fates weave, for Proclus, soul's strange and particular lot as the kind of being that is always related to the good (regardless of whether one choses the liberated life). That is, much like Night herself and the supercelestial place which binds the intelligible and intellectual with lived power, individual souls, too, receive in the depth of their being the intelligible principles from what comes before, nourishing souls with divine power from there. As a consequence, souls become communicative of the beauty and justice permeating that which is neither altogether being or the same or wholly unified. Rather, much like Night's daughter, Adrasteia, the Soul/individuals souls in their own femininity bind and transmit the sublimity of the otherness, the multiplicity, the difference permeating every life in the sensible cosmos, as well as the divine bond guiding individuals to recognize that each soul is truly their mothers' daughter—erotic and beautiful in revealing and communicating the good, touching everything from first to last.

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61 See *in Ti.* III 277, 24–31.

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PART 4

A Concluding Look at Two Christian Neoplatonists

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CHAPTER 12

Macrina's Method: Reason and Reasoning in Gregory of Nyssa's *On Soul and Resurrection*

Peter Adamson

The Cappadocian church father Gregory of Nyssa's portrayal of his sister Macrina the Younger (d. 379 AD) has been called "the most spectacular representation of a woman saint as philosopher" in antiquity.[1] One could go even further. It would be entirely reasonable to describe Gregory's hagiographical *Life of Macrina* and especially his dialogue *On Soul and Resurrection* as the fullest representation of any woman philosopher, Christian or pagan, in ancient European culture—at least if we restrict our attention to figures who were definitely real people. As nearly every interpreter of *On Soul and Resurrection* has remarked, in this dialogue Macrina features as a kind of Christian, female Socrates.[2] A number of scholars have also emphasized her similarity to another Platonic character who notoriously was not definitely a real person, Diotima of the *Symposium*.[3] A third of Plato's works is another touchstone for Gregory in this text. The image from the *Phaedrus* of the soul as a chariot pulled by two horses appears several times and usually with approval, though Macrina is made to dismiss it rather brusquely at one point (*AR* 33 [49]).

Nonetheless the most obvious comparison, and the one Gregory surely had uppermost in his mind, is indeed between Macrina and the Socrates of the *Phaedo*. Not only is Macrina facing death (albeit of natural causes, unlike Socrates) and giving arguments for the soul's immortality; she is also pointedly contrasted to Gregory, whose despair at the recent death of his brother Basil and at Macrina's imminent demise makes him at first incapable of rational dis-

1 Clark (1998), 423.

2 I will refer to the work as *AR*, and cite page numbers from the recent edition in Spira, *Gregorii Nysseni*, which I have used for the Greek text; I also provide in square brackets page numbers from the *Patrologia graeca*, vol. 46, as this is the reference for most literature on the text. For English translations see Callahan (1967), Roth (1993), Moore and Wilson (1994), Silvas (2008). I have consulted the versions of Moore and Silvas, but all translations in the chapter are my own. For general studies of the work see Apostolopoulos (1986), Meissner (1991).

3 For the latter comparison see Burrus (2005, 252), Cherniss (1971, 49), Clark (1998, 424), Ludlow (2007, 211), Ludlow (2009, 468), Roth (1992, 21). Particularly reminiscent of Diotima is a passage describing the soul's yearning for God as a desire for beauty, at *AR* 66 [*PG* 89].

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cussion (*AR* 2 [12–13]). Her chastizement of Gregory seems a clear allusion to *Phaedo* 117d–e, and an ironic one given that there, Socrates criticizes his weeping friends for acting like the women he sent away at the dialogue's opening. Here it is a woman who is calm and rational, her brother who is in the grip of emotion.[4] This passage is, however, also one of those that alludes to the famous allegory of the chariot in the *Phaedrus*. Macrina is compared to a charioteer, at first letting Gregory express his grief before reining him in, so as to "restore the disorder of my soul with her own reasoning (τῷ ἰδίῳ λογισμῷ τὸ ἀτακτοῦν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπευθύνουσα)." Shortly thereafter she wonders at Gregory's adopting the "custom of unreasonable people (ἡ τῶν ἀλογωτέρων συνήθεια)" by fearing death (*AR* 4 [16]).

In emphasizing Macrina's commitment to reason rather than emotion, and in depicting her as a philosopher who is akin to Socrates, indeed as his own "teacher (ἡ διδάσκαλος),"[5] Gregory suggests that by the standards of ancient gender norms she is a masculine figure, or at least in some sense no longer female. That would fit with a remark at the beginning of the *Life of Macrina*, where Gregory writes that he is unsure whether it is proper to call Macrina a woman because of her rising above the nature of her gender (τὴν ἄνω γενομένηντῆς φύσεως).[6] By this he would not mean only, or even mostly, that Macrina was given to philosophical argumentation, which is not a central theme in the *Life of Macrina*, but that she was a virgin whose piety had led her to withdraw from the typical womanly life of matrimony, motherhood, and household management.[7] Nonetheless, the dialogue *On Soul and Resurrection* offers a complementary portrayal, in which Macrina has transcended femininity to become a paragon of rationality.

Reactions to Gregory's literary presentation of Macrina—which, it should always be remembered, is what we are dealing with here—have varied. For Verna Harrison, Gregory's willingness to masculinize Macrina involves questioning contemporary expectations of women: "The language of women 'becoming male' is a way of transcending culturally entrenched misogyny, not a

4 For readings of this aspect of the dialogue see Boersma (2013, 141–142), Smith (2001), Williams (1993). The intertextual relation with the *Phaedo* is so detailed that there is even a reference to phantoms lingering around graves at *AR* 64–65 [88], recalling *Phaedo* 81c–d.

5 As Williams (1993, 244) points out, this expression captures Macrina's gender ambiguity by combining a feminine definite article with a masculine noun.

6 I cite from the edition in Maraval (1971, 1.15–17), for English translations of this work see Corrigan (2001), Silvas (2008).

7 See Burrus (2005, 258), Harrison (1997, 46). It should be noted that in the *Life of Macrina* itself, and in the writings of the Cappadocians more generally, the word "philosophy" is used to mean a commitment to a pious and ascetic way of life. See Silvas (2008, 37 n. 1).

reaffirmation of it."[8] Others have been less favorable. Virginia Burrus credits Gregory with nothing more than a creative, but still objectifying, appropriation of the female by "male-centered discourse."[9] Elizabeth Clark suggests more positively that Gregory is using Macrina's voice in order to "think through" difficult theological problems, though she also points out that in a passage like the opening of the dialogue where Macrina is compared to a charioteer, she serves as a "shaming device for Christian men."[10]

I will return to Macrina's gender towards the end of this paper.[11] To prepare the way for doing so, I first want to delve more deeply into the issue of her rationality. It is one thing to note that she praises reason and offers philosophical arguments. It is another thing to say how rational argument should proceed, according to Gregory's Macrina, and what place she gives to reason within the human person. This is the goal of the present contribution. After a section on Macrina's philosophical methodology in the dialogue, I will look more closely at her deployment of a central premise or background assumption, which I will call the "likeness principle." Though this principle has its original home in natural philosophy, it proves to have far-reaching implications for Macrina's account of the human soul and its relation to God. It can be used as a litmus test for determining what does and does not belong to the human soul in its essence. As it turns out, what is essential to the human soul is nothing other than reason, a doctrinal commitment of Gregory's that, I will argue, was the decisive factor shaping the presentation of his sister in this dialogue.

1 Macrina's Method

Macrina would surely want us to begin a discussion of her methodology by saying something about Holy Scripture. In one of the numerous passages where she makes slighting remarks about "outside" or pagan philosophy (ἡ ἔξω φιλοσοφία), Macrina observes that the Hellenic thinkers have failed to reach agree-

8 Harrison (1992, 447).

9 Burrus (2005, 261).

10 Clark (1998, 426, 429).

11 Also worth mentioning is the different approach of Muehlberger (2012) which argues that the cultural dichotomy at the heart of *AR* is not male-female but Christian-pagan. Gregory is writing in a period of flourishing Christian self-confidence and wishes to bring his readers to see that pagan philosophy, and culture more generally, still has something to offer. Thus Macrina is compared to Socrates in order to "legitimate" him (292). See just below for further consideration of her attitude towards pagan thought; for this issue in late ancient Christian philosophy more generally, see Karamanolis (2013).

ment about the nature of the soul. This is standard polemic used by ancient Christians against their pagan rivals. We may be reminded of the ancient Skeptics when Christians suggest that such disagreement is only to be expected because, when left to its own devices, human reason finds itself in a state of indecision about philosophical questions. In fact, in this very dialogue the character Gregory at one point evokes the Skeptical notion of balanced arguments (ἰσοσθένεια), yielding indecision (ἐποχή):

> Uncertainty about the way things really are puts conceptions on either side of the question on an equal footing, it seeming this way to many, the opposite way to many others. In fact certain people who in the eyes of the Hellenes have no mean reputation, believe and affirm these things [sc. that the soul does not survive the death of the body].
>
> ἴσας γὰρ ποιεῖ τοῦ ἀληθῶς ὄντος ἀδηλία τὰς ἐφ' ἑκάτερον ὑπολήψεις καὶ πολλοῖς μὲν τοῦτο, πολλοῖς δὲ τὸ ἐναντίον δοκεῖ καὶ εἰσί γέ τινες παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν οὐ μικρὰν ἔχοντες ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίᾳ τὴν δόξαν, οἳ ταῦτα ᾠήθησάν τε καὶ ἀπεφήναντο.
>
> *AR* 6 [17]

To which Macrina replies, "away with this pagan trash (ἔα τοὺς ἔξωθεν λήρους)!"

She can do better than the pagans, because she has a resource unavailable to them, in the shape of revealed truth:

> For them [sc. the pagans], inquiry into the soul could proceed at liberty wherever it seemed to lead. But we are not at liberty just to say whatever we want, since we use the Holy Scripture as a yardstick and rule for every teaching, being compelled to look to it and accept only that which is in harmony with the intention of the texts.
>
> ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῖς μὲν κατὰ τὸ φανὲν ἀκόλουθον κατ' ἐξουσίαν προῆλθεν ἡ περὶ ψυχῆς θεωρία· ἡμεῖς δὲ τῆς ἐξουσίας ἄμοιροι ταύτης ἐσμὲν, τῆς τοῦ λέγειν φημί, ἅπερ βουλόμεθα—κανόνι παντὸς δόγματος καὶ νόμῳ κεχρημένοι τῇ ἁγίᾳ γραφῇ, ἀναγκαίως πρὸς ταύτην βλέποντες τοῦτο δεχόμεθα μόνον, ὅ τι περ ἂν ᾖ σύμφωνον τῷ τῶν γεγραμμένων σκοπῷ.
>
> *AR* 33 [49]

As her formulation here indicates, however, Scripture is used throughout the dialogue not immediately to settle each question, but as a "yardstick (κανών)" against which to measure the results of the philosophical inquiry. Thus, Scripture is typically invoked only after a stretch of argumentation in order to con-

firm the conclusion that has been reached. This too is fairly typical of late ancient Christian philosophy, already a striking feature of Origen's *On Principles*, for example. And, as Harold Cherniss once pointed out, Macrina's rule if anything tends to encourage contorted readings of Scripture to make it fit with the deliverances of philosophical inquiry.[12]

If the invocation of Scripture comes at the end of such an inquiry, as a kind of quality control, then how does the inquiry begin? There is no passage in the dialogue where this question is addressed explicitly, so we need to look to Macrina's argumentative practice for an answer. Helpfully she does flag what she is doing by using the technical terminology of philosophical method. Thus the proofs of soul's immortality begin by invoking a "conception (ἔννοια)" of the soul, as follows:

> We understand it as existing in its own right with an extraordinary nature all its own, distinct from the solidity of body. For, coming to know everything in the world through sensory perception, we are thereby led through the activity of our senses to a conception of that which is above sensation.
>
> ὑπειλήφαμεν δὲ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὴν καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἐν ἐξηλλαγμένῃ τε καὶ ἰδιαζούσῃ φύσει παρὰ τὴν σωματικὴν παχυμέρειαν. ὡς γὰρ πάντα τὸν κόσμον διὰ τῆς αἰσθητικῆς ἀντιλήψεως ἐπιγινώσκοντες, δι' αὐτῆς τῆς κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν ἡμῶν ἐνεργείας εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὑπὲρ αἴσθησιν πράγματος καὶ νοήματος ἔννοιαν ὁδηγούμεθα.
>
> *AR* 13 [28]

This passage is typical of Gregory, who frequently states that all our knowledge is ultimately grounded in sense-perception but that the empirical basis of our knowledge does not rule out our reaching an understanding of immaterial entities like God and the soul.[13] We can grasp the soul through its influence on the body and the activities it exercises through the body.

The passage just cited does not give us much to go on, since the "conception" is entirely negative: the soul is *not* bodily and *not* graspable by the senses, at least not directly. So it is still reasonable for Gregory to pose the question, "what then is the soul?" and to ask for an "outline (ὑπογραφή)" of its nature. To this Macrina responds that various people have said different things in "defining (ὁριζόμενοι)" soul, but she prefers the following account:

12 Cherniss (1971, 9).

13 For his empiricism see Behr (1999, 230), Carvanos (1976, 68), Ludlow (2009, 478).

> The soul is a created substance, a living and intellective one, which bestows upon an organic and sensitive body the power of living and of sense-perception.

> ψυχή ἐστιν οὐσία γενητή, οὐσία ζῶσα, νοερὰ, σώματι ὀργανικῷ καὶ αἰσθητικῷ δύναμιν ζωτικὴν καὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀντιληπτικὴν δι' ἑαυτῆς ἐνιεῖσα.
>
> *AR* 15 [29]

As if to bring home the empirical basis of this definition she goes on to give an illustration taken from medicine, one which incidentally reinforces her steely resolve in the face of death. The doctor sitting in the room in attendance upon her is said to reach his diagnosis of an unseen disease on the basis of the sallow complexion, glazed eyes, groans of pain, and shortness of breath observed in the patient (that is, Macrina herself!).

At this juncture, Gregory the character seems to make a mistake. Overlooking the positive characterizations of soul included in the definition just given—it is an *ousia*, which is living and intellective—he fastens on the contrast that Macrina has drawn between the perceptible body and the imperceptible soul. This leads him to state more explicitly the potential objection I have just suggested, namely that this contrast gives us only a negative characterization of the soul. As Gregory puts it, "I wanted to learn, not what the soul isn't, but what it is." Macrina's answer comes in two moves (*AR* 24 [40]). First, she challenges the assumption that a purely negative account is uninformative. For in many cases "we do learn what a topic of inquiry is by saying that it is not some given thing (μανθάνομεν ἐν τῷ μὴ τόδε τι λέγειν εἶναι αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τοῦ ζητουμένου)." Interestingly one of her examples is that we can indicate that a person is a coward by describing him as "not-manly (ἄνανδρον)." This is, she says, a legitimate way to come to a "conception" of soul, here again using the word ἔννοια.

Gregory persists, however, arguing that if sensation gives us no immediate awareness of the soul and all our knowledge is grounded in sensation, then we cannot be sure that it exists. Again, Macrina could answer this challenge by reminding Gregory of what has already been established with the analogy to medicine: sensation often gives us knowledge of what cannot be sensed. Instead she points out that Gregory's objection could be applied just as well to God:

> If we eliminate from existence everything that cannot be known through sensation, then someone who says this will not admit even the power that is set over the universe and encompasses all beings.

> Εἰ γὰρ ἐξήρηται τοῦ ὄντος ἅπαν, ὃ μὴ τῇ αἰσθήσει γνωρίζεται, οὐδ' ἂν αὐτὴν τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἐπιστατοῦσαν καὶ περιδεδραγμένην τῶν ὄντων δύναμιν ὁμολογοίη πάντως ὁ τοῦτο λέγων.
>
> *AR* 25–26 [41]

In other words, the same line of argument could be used in support of atheism. This point has already been made above against materialist schools from the Hellenistic period (*AR* 10 [24]), and Gregory finds it convincing. But it leads to yet another worry on his part, which is that now it sounds like God and the soul are being put on a par.

This would be a good objection if we really did have a purely negative account of both God and the soul, where all we could say about either of them is that they are not bodies. But in fact we know more than that. We know that the soul shares some features with God while not sharing other features. The soul is, in other words, both *like* and *unlike* God.[14] Macrina explains this to Gregory using the Biblical idea that we are created in God's image:

> For that which has come to be as an image of God has, in all respects, a similarity to its archetype: intellective like the intellective, incorporeal like the incorporeal [...] but in its own proper nature it is different from that. For it would no longer be an image if it were entirely the same as that.
>
> Τὸ γὰρ κατ' εἰκόνα γενόμενον διὰ πάντων ἔχει πάντως τὴν πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ὁμοιότητα, νοερὰν τοῦ νοεροῦ, καὶ τοῦ ἀσωμάτου ἀσώματον [...] ἄλλο δέ τι παρ' ἐκεῖνο κατὰ τὴν τῆς φύσεως ἰδιότητα. Οὐκέτι γὰρ ἂν εἴη εἰκών, εἰ διὰ πάντων εἴη ταὐτὸν ἐκείνῳ.
>
> *AR* 26 [41]

Here Macrina is merely spelling out what was already clear from her initial "definition" of the soul, according to which it is substance that is living and intellective like God is, but unlike God in being created. One might even say that this definition itself simply spelled out what it means to say that the soul is "created in God's image": "in God's image" because it is like God, yet "created" and *only* an image because it is not wholly like God.

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14 It should be stressed that Macrina always puts the point in these terms: soul is an image of God and "like" Him but this does not mean, for instance, that God and the soul would share a genus, something that would be excluded by the well-known tendency towards apophaticism in the Cappadocians.

Here Macrina the teacher and Gregory the author are keeping track of the argument better than Gregory the character is. She patiently and gradually brings him to grasp what was already contained *in nuce* in the opening definition. In the process Gregory, and presumably the reader along with him, are brought to understand two points that would not be immediately obvious from that definition. First, that the foundation of our knowledge in sense-perception does not rule out knowledge of the soul, because it can be grasped indirectly through the powers it manifests in the body, and because a negative approach can yield positive knowledge. Second, that our best way of understanding the "proper nature" of soul is through the incomplete likeness it bears to God.

All this is established through Macrina's dialectical engagement with Gregory's objections. More like a mirror image of Socrates than Socrates, she lets her brother pose the problems and questions and leads him to an improved understanding by answering his concerns one after another. Her ability to do this depends on her having the right starting points: a general conception of soul as something distinct from the body and a sound definition of soul as created, living, intellective substance. The conception and definition already imply how she should respond to Gregory on each point, but he is not able to see this until she explains it to him. Thus Macrina's method as a teacher consists in a dialectical refutation of objections, while her method as a philosopher is to lay down principles and unfold their implications, always being sure to check the results against Scripture. This may seem unsatisfying, insofar as the crucial work all seems to get done by settling on the right opening definition, and Macrina does not tell us how she arrived at that definition. But we have seen her invoke a more general idea that could have helped her to do so: that the soul relates to God as an image to its paradigm, and that this relation consists in imperfect likeness. In the next section, I want to consider this notion more carefully.

2 Soul's Likeness to God

As already intimated in the introduction to this paper, throughout the dialogue Macrina accepts as a basic premise what we may call the likeness principle. In its most basic form, this principle says:

> If A is by nature like B, A is attracted by or tends towards B.

This principle of course goes right back to the beginnings of ancient Greek philosophy. Thus Empedocles said that "like aims at like," as Aristotle mentions

in his account of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1155b7–8: τὸ ὅμοιον τοῦ ὁμοίου ἐφίεσθαι). One can see the principle at work in certain theories of nutrition, according to which each thing pursues nutrition that is akin to it, something also mentioned by Aristotle in *On the Soul* (416a29–30: τὸ ὅμοιον τῷ ὁμοίῳ τρέφεσθα).

For Macrina, it explains something as basic as elemental motion. It is not, for instance, an Aristotelian theory of natural place or an atomist theory of density that accounts for this, but the fact that the elements "want" to be with what is similar to themselves.[15] This is clear from her account of the decay of a body after death:

> When the constitution of the elements in the body is destroyed, each of the elements will incline as appropriate to that which is like it in nature, due to a certain necessary attraction calling what is proper to what is akin, so that the hot in us will become one with the hot, and the earthy [in us] to the solid, and there will be a tendency for each of the others to go to what is akin.
>
> λυθείσης δὲ τῶν στοιχείων τῆς ἐν τῷ σώματι συμφυΐας, ἐπὶ τὸ οἰκεῖον ἑκάστῳ γίνεται κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἡ ῥοπὴ αὐτῆς τῆς φύσεως τῶν στοιχείων δι' ὁλκῆς τινος ἀναγκαίας τῷ ὁμογενεῖ τὸ οἰκεῖον ἀποδιδούσης· τῷ τε γὰρ θερμῷ πάλιν τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θερμὸν ἑνωθήσεται, καὶ τῷ στερρῷ τὸ γεῶδες καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἑκάστῳ πρὸς τὸ συγγενὲς ἡ μεταχώρησις γίνεται.
>
> *AR* 7 [20]

The converse of the likeness principle would state that things tend to be repelled by what is unlike them, and Macrina accepts this too. She uses it to refute the possibility of metempsychosis, arguing that if human souls could reincarnate in the bodies of non-rational animals, then this would "confuse the properties of nature, and all things would be mixed and mingled with one another (συσχεῖν μοι δοκοῦσι τὰς τῆς φύσεως ἰδιότητας καὶ πάντα χρήματα καταμιγνύειν τε καὶ ἀναφύρειν πρὸς ἄλληλα)" (*AR* 82 [109]).

Within the account of bodily resurrection, Macrina's commitment to the likeness principle gives rise to a problem. It needs to be shown how the soul can overcome the natural tendency of the elements to sift apart. The soul must

15 This actually seems insufficient, since it would not explain why, e.g., fire and earth gather together in different places. Either further explanation is needed, or Macrina could simply say that the already existing predominance of earth near the center of the cosmos (where God put it) means that other bits of earth are attracted there.

somehow gather back together the elemental constituents of its body once they have "gone where nature leads them (ἡ φύσις ἄγοι)," namely "towards what is akin to them (ἐπὶ τὰ συγγενῆ)" (*AR* 30 [45]). But already in this life, the soul has had to do the same sort of work. The opposition between hot and cold, wet and dry, does not stop the soul from combining the various elements in a single body. So "nothing prevents the soul being equally present to the bodily elements, regardless of whether these are brought together due to combination or dispersed due to being separated (οὐκοῦν οὐδὲν ἐμπόδιόν ἐστι τῇ ψυχῇ κατὰ τὸ ἴσον παρεῖναι τοῖς τοῦ σώματος στοιχείοις, καὶ συγκεκραμένοις διὰ τῆς συνδρομῆς, καὶ ἀπολυομένοις διὰ[16] τῆς ἀνακράσεως)" (*AR* 30 [48]). In its ability to combine opposing elements, soul is again like God. Macrina says that God's providential power is needed to hold together physical elements in the cosmos despite their being naturally opposed to one another (ὡς ἐναντίως ἔχοντα πρὸς ἄλληλα τὰ στοιχεῖα κατὰ τὴν φύσιν, *AR* 12 [25]). The same goes for soul's ability to be present in the body as an entirety, which mirrors God's omnipresence in the physical cosmos despite being entirely different from physical things (οὔτε συγγενῶς, *AR* 10 [24]).[17]

Since the soul is indeed like God, we can apply the likeness principle to infer that it must be attracted towards God. In fact Macrina explicitly invokes the principle in making this very point:

> If then every nature attracts what is appropriate to it, and the human is in a way appropriate to God given that it bears within itself resemblances of the archetype, then by every necessity the soul is attracted to the divine which is akin to it.
>
> ἐπεὶ οὖν ἑλκτικὴ τῶν οἰκείων πᾶσα φύσις ἐστὶν, οἰκεῖον δέ πως τῷ Θεῷ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἅτε δὴ φέρον ἐν ἑαυτῷ τοῦ ἀρχετύπου μιμήματα, ἕλκεται κατὰ πᾶσαν ἀνάγκην πρὸς τὸ θεῖόν τε καὶ συγγενὲς ἡ ψυχή.
>
> *AR* 71 [97]

In fact she applies the idea not only to humans but to all created things, saying that "all things must by a certain order and sequence be made appropriate to the divine nature, following the artful wisdom of their overseer (πάντα χρὴ τάξει τινὶ καὶ ἀκολουθίᾳ κατὰ τὴν τεχνικὴν τοῦ καθηγεμόνος σοφίαν τῇ θείᾳ προσοικειωθῆναι φύσει)" (*AR* 78 [105]).

16 I retain διὰ as in the *PG*, omitted by Spira (2014).

17 Cf. *On the Creation of the Human* (*De opificio hominis*, hereafter *Opif. hom.*) 161, 177 in the Greek text of *PG* vol. 44.

We need to take account of a complexity here, though. According to the principle as stated above, any two things that are by nature alike should be attracted to each other. This makes sense with two portions of fire. They are on a par with one another, so that each portion strives to be together with the other. But the relationship between God and the soul is asymmetrical: we would certainly not want to say that God is attracted by the soul. We already know, of course, what kind of asymmetrical relationship is involved here. The soul is an *image* of God, who is the soul's archetype or paradigm. In this sort of case attraction is not simply a matter of two things mutually striving to be together. Rather, we have a relation that is still teleological, but one-sided. While the archetype remains unmoved and without desire, the image strives or desires to become as much like the archetype as possible. So we can formulate a new version of our likeness principle for this situation, as follows:

> If A is like B by being an image of B, then A is attracted by B and perfected insofar as it becomes more similar to B; but not vice-versa.

As we saw, the process of attaining perfection cannot end in complete sameness, because if it did then the image would no longer be an image. In other words A must remain inferior to B. On the other hand, the process of attaining perfection does not begin with complete dissimilarity, since A is already an image of B. We can therefore say that the image begins with a certain kinship to its paradigm and then seeks to improve by becoming ever more akin, without ever attaining the status of complete similarity.

In the case of the soul and God, the soul's initial kinship to God consists in its sharing certain properties like life, intellectivity, and of course immortality. This, we might say, is Macrina's version of the "affinity argument" from Plato's *Phaedo*: just as there the soul is like the Forms and thus indestructible as they are, so here the soul is like God and likewise immortal. From this starting point the soul can do even better by achieving a greater approximation of divinity.[18] And this, of course, is Macrina's version of the injunction to attain likeness to God in Plato's *Theaetetus*.[19] She duly speaks of the soul striving to imitate the "properties of the divine nature (ἰδιώμασι τῆς θείας φύσεως)" (*AR* 69 [93]) and even uses the word *homoiosis* for this process:

18 Conversely, insofar as it is perverted through sin the soul becomes less an image of God. For discussion of this idea in *Opif. hom.* see Behr (1999, 233).

19 See Sedley (1999).

> For what is truly said to be assimilation to the divine, in the strict sense of the term, lies in this: our soul's imitating in some way the transcendent substance.[20]

> ἀληθῶς γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ ἔστιν εἰπεῖν τὴν ἀκριβῆ πρὸς τὸ Θεῖον εἶναι ὁμοίωσιν ἐν τῷ μιμεῖσθαί πως τὴν ἡμετέραν ψυχὴν τὴν ὑπερκειμένην οὐσίαν.
>
> *AR* 67 [89–92]

This accords with other works by Gregory, which also use the Platonic idea of assimilation to God. Thus, in *On the Creation of the Human* he says that as the image of God, the soul acquires similarity to its divine archetype by being filled with goodness (ἄρ' ἐν τῷ πλῆρες εἶναι παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ, πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἡ εἰκὼν ἔχει τὴν ὁμοιότητα, *Opif. hom.* 184).[21]

If the soul strives towards perfection by trying to come ever closer to God, to whose nature it is akin, then is there also something it should flee, the way that fire flees opposed elemental bodies? Macrina's answer is a firm "yes." The soul must divest itself, insofar as it can, of everything that makes it unlike God and everything that connects it to what is unlike God. This may be compared to the purification of gold, or to scraping mud off a rope so that it can be pulled through a hole:

> In just such a way, it seems to me, one may conceive of the soul as being wrapped up in material and earthy attachments through the passions, laboring and being stretched as God attracts that which is proper to Him, and as what is foreign, but has somehow accreted to [the soul], having to be scraped off by force.

> τοιοῦτόν τί μοι δοκεῖ καὶ τὸ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐννοεῖν ταῖς ὑλικαῖς τε καὶ γεώδεσι προσπαθείαις ἐνειληθεῖσαν, κάμνειν καὶ διατείνεσθαι τοῦ μὲν Θεοῦ τὸ ἴδιον πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἕλκοντος, τοῦ δ' ἀλλοτρίου διὰ τὸ συμφυῆναί πως αὐτῇ βιαίως ἀποξυρομένου.
>
> *AR* 73 [100]

Macrina's main point here is that the soul must suffer if it is to attain godlikeness. But in the process she is making, or perhaps better presupposing, a further

20 A variant manuscript reading has "nature" albeit with a marginal note saying that other manuscripts have "soul"; *PG* reads "life."

21 For discussion see Cherniss (1971, 47–48), Behr (1999, 236).

point, namely that whatever makes the soul more unlike God by making it like material things is "foreign" to it.

It may be noticed that in the passage just cited Macrina uses the concept of a "passionate attachment (προσπάθεια)," found in Neoplatonists like Porphyry when they refer to the soul's connection to the body as inhibiting a return to the intelligible.[22] The likeness principle implies that we should privilege and encourage the soul's rational nature and eliminate such attachments. This means suppressing the desire and anger associated with the lower parts of the soul. Accordingly we find earlier in the dialogue, in a section where Gregory has asked Macrina about the emotions, another remark that explicitly invokes the soul's inherent likeness to God:

> Anyone who says that the soul is a likeness of God should declare that all that is foreign to God falls outside the definition of the soul. For the similar is not preserved through deviations. Since, then, such things are not ascribed to the divine nature, one could reasonably suppose that they are not substantial for the soul either.
>
> ὁ γὰρ ὁμοίωμα Θεοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι εἰπὼν πᾶν, ὃ ἀλλότριόν ἐστι Θεοῦ, ἐκτὸς εἶναι τοῦ ὅρου τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπεφήνατο· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν ἐν τοῖς παρηλλαγμένοις διασωθείη τὸ ὅμοιον. οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ τοιοῦτον οὐδὲν τῇ θείᾳ συνθεωρεῖται φύσει, οὐδὲ τῇ ψυχῇ συνουσιῶσθαι ταῦτα κατὰ λόγον ἄν τις ὑπονοήσειεν.
>
> *AR* 34 [52]

Likewise in *On the Creation of the Human*, Gregory says that being "without passion (ἀπάθεια)" is among those things "through which the likeness to God is formed in humans (δι' ὧν μορφοῦται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἡ πρὸς τὸ Θεῖον ὁμοίωσις)" (*Opif. hom.* 137).[23]

Some interpreters of this dialogue have been happy to see Macrina as a straightforward upholder of *apatheia*, seeing this as a borrowing from the Platonic tradition.[24] Rowan Williams, however, disagrees. He writes: "Whatever Gregory believed, it was *not* that the human subject consisted of a rational core with some embarrassing additions. The language about passion being extrinsic to the definition of human spirituality is partly a self-evident consequence of

22 See Porphyry, *Sentences* 28, 10 Lambertz.

23 For the passage see Behr (1999, 226). A similar idea is found also in his *Life of Moses*: see Smith (2001, 39 n. 12).

24 For instance Apostolopoulos (1986, 156), Ladner (1985). For more on Gregory's anthropologist as (Neo)Platonist see Meredith (1989), Pellegrino (1938), Peroli (1997).

treating intellectual or spiritual life as intrinsically active and initiatory, partly the result of an unhappy and rather confused assumption that 'essential' definition has to do with some sort of unique substrate only."[25] Here I would say that Williams is optimistically ascribing to Gregory, or Macrina, the doctrine he as a theologian would personally endorse, rather than the doctrine actually put forward by the text. Actually, as the end of this quote reveals, he understands perfectly well what is being argued in the dialogue; he just doesn't like it.

In fact, as we've seen, the "definition" of soul does indeed make soul an exclusively immaterial, intellective substance. From this definition, and the likeness principle, it follows that the soul's perfection lies in eliminating all connections to the body including the emotional tendencies of the lower "souls." These are mere accretions which have "grown onto (συμφυῆναί)" the soul. They are, in Williams' happy phrase, precisely embarassing additions, which inhibit godlikeness and virtue. Macrina has another way of arguing for this claim, which is highly reminiscent of Aristotle's "function argument" from *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7. Notice how she yet again puts the point in terms of the soul's "definition" as she eliminates the lower souls from the human's true nature:

> For every essential definition looks to what is proper to its subject, whereas whatever is outside the proper is disregarded, as being foreign to the definition. But the activity of spirit and desire is agreed to be common to every nature both irrational and rational, and whatever is common is not to be identified with proper characteristics. Therefore, one must not say that these [sc. spirit and desire] are among those features by which human nature is uniquely characterized.
>
> πᾶς γὰρ ὁρισμὸς οὐσίας πρὸς τὸ ἴδιον τοῦ ὑποκειμένου βλέπει, ὃ τι δ' ἂν ἔξω τοῦ ἰδιάζοντος ᾖ, ὡς ἀλλότριον παρορᾶται τοῦ ὅρου. ἀλλὰ μὴν ἡ κατὰ θυμόν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν ἐνέργεια κοινὴ πάσης τῆς ἀλόγου ⟨τε καὶ λογικῆς⟩[26] φύσεως ὁμολογεῖται· πᾶν δὲ τὸ κοινὸν, οὐ ταὐτόν ἐστι τῷ ἰδιάζοντι· ἀνάγκη ἄρα διὰ τούτων ἐστὶ μὴ ἐν τούτοις εἶναι ταῦτα λογίζεσθαι, ἐν οἷς κατ' ἐξαίρετον ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη χαρακτηρίζεται φύσις.
>
> *AR* 35 [53]

This is not inconsistent with the idea that the emotions can play a positive role in human life and assist the soul in coming to God. As Williams reminds us,

25 Williams (1993, 236).

26 See Spira *Gregorii Nysseni*'s note ad loc. for this insertion.

Macrina expertly steers Gregory's emotional tendencies at the beginning of the dialogue, in part by letting him give vent to them.[27] Still J. Warren Smith seems right to say, in a critical response to Williams, that the purpose of this opening scene is to show Macrina helping Gregory to "purge" himself of powerful emotions.[28] She thereby puts Gregory in a position to engage in the rational reflection that is sustained over the rest of the dialogue.

The upshot is that the literary presentation of Macrina and the psychological theory she endorses mesh perfectly. She teaches that the soul is in its essence like God, that is to say, intellectual by nature and free of all that is bodily or emotional. In keeping with this, she comports herself in a thoroughly rational way. She eliminates the passions to a heroic extent, something epitomized above all by her youthful insistence on committing herself to remaining a lifelong virgin. This immunity to bodily desire is showcased in the *Life of Macrina*, but our dialogue also underscores her resistance to the lower souls. This is why she does not fear her own death, nor for that matter engage in an outpouring of grief over the recent demise of Basil, who is after all her brother just as much as Gregory's.[29] Believing herself to be, at least at her best, nothing but a godlike rational soul, her reaction to death, whether her own or that of her loved ones, is to put her reason to good use so as to dispel inordinate grief and fear.

3 Macrina and Gender

As promised, this brings us back to the question of Macrina as a literary creation of her brother Gregory. Throughout I have been speaking as if it is *her* method that is under discussion, and *her* views on reason and the soul. But I have also said in passing that there are parallels between *On the Soul and Resurrection* and other works by Gregory of Nyssa, especially *On the Creation of the Human*. Resonances that I have not mentioned along the way, but that have been noted by others, include the use of natural science in our dialogue and elsewhere in his

27 Williams (1993, 237): we can "use the affective life as an instrument."

28 Smith (2001, 46). A similar point is made by Boersma (2013, 141–142).

29 This is matched by her portrayal in the *Life of Macrina*, where she shows fortitude in the face of Basil's death and the earlier demise of another brother, Naucratius, also comforting her mother much as she does Gregory at the beginning of *AR*. It might also be noted that, according to Gregory himself, Macrina's success at bringing him around to calm reasoning was short-lived; at *Life* 228 he is overcome by his emotions when Macrina actually dies. Significantly he is here carried away by the lamentation of Macrina's female companions.

corpus,[30] talk of the soul as having three parts,[31] the rejection of determinism, and the idea that humans are microcosms, that is, reflect in miniature all that is in the universe.[32] Quite naturally, therefore, studies of Gregory's anthropology have drawn jointly on these two works as sources for his (not her) thought. All of which prompts the question: is Macrina just Gregory under another name?

Two basic points need to be made in response, though I shall belabor neither because they too have been made by others.[33] First, the dramatic framing of the dialogue is based on real events. In keeping with this, the reader is being asked to accept the text as, if not a faithful recording of a real conversation, then at least a sufficiently realistic account that the dialogue works at the dramatic level. In other words Gregory expects his (ancient) reader to admire, but also believe in, Macrina, who is both an idealized female thinker and a real person whose life story may be familiar from Gregory's hagiography of her. Second, as we lack independent access to Macrina as a philosopher, we have no real way to disentangle her from Gregory the author.[34] Even if one were to point to differences of doctrine or emphasis between her teaching in this dialogue and what Gregory says elsewhere, that could as easily be explained in terms of his authorial decisions or changes of mind, as it could be explained in terms of fidelity to his sister's ideas.

In light of this, it might be better to focus on a different question: what is Gregory saying about gender by portraying Macrina as he does? His views on gender more generally have attracted extensive commentary from historians of Christian thought.[35] According to a traditional reading accepted by most scholars, Gregory believes that gender is accidental to human beings as such. His *On the Creation of the Human* seems to say that God first created humans in their fundamental essence, and only then in a kind of "second creation" gave them (that is, gave Adam and Eve) gender. God did this only in anticipation of the fall and subsequent need to engage in sexual reproduction. Gender will, however, become surplus to requirements in our lives following the resurrection, and therefore does not figure in his eschatology. This, incidentally, is another point on which the two anthropological treatises of Gregory apparently agree.

30 Ludlow (2009, 474).

31 Ladner (1985, 70).

32 For the latter two points see Clark (1998, 427).

33 For instance Silvas (2008, 160–161).

34 We do get further biographical information from Basil of Caesarea, translated in Silvas (2008), but this is far less help than, say, Aristophanes and Xenophon are in the search for the historical figure behind Plato's Socrates.

35 See, e.g., Albrecht (1986), Burrus (2005), Clark (1998), Floeri (1953), Harrison (1992) and (1997).

In *On Soul and Resurrection*, Gregory has Macrina argue that in our risen state, we will lose the characteristics that arise through the passions (ἰδιώματα, ὅσα διὰ τῆς ἐμπαθοῦς διαθέσεως ἐπεκτήσατο, *AR* 119 [156]).

Gregory the character wonders why we will need to be resurrected as bodies at all, which is a reasonable enough question given that, as we have seen in this paper, the dialogue teaches that humans are at core immaterial, rational souls. Macrina however argues that we will receive perfect versions of our bodies, which will free us from the "life of passion (τῇ παθητικῇ ζωῇ συνηνέχθη)." This life she associates with our present, inferior bodies which are like "tunics" or "skins" akin to those of irrational animals (ἀλόγων δερμάτων) (*AR* 113–114 [148]).[36] This seems to show only that resurrection is unproblematic, rather than showing that there is *good reason* for us to receive resurrected bodies, such that something would be missing if we were simply to exist as disembodied souls. In her discussion of the doctrine Macrina is most in apologetic mode, showing that resurrection is indeed both possible and unproblematic. She does however define resurrection as a return to our natural, prelapsarian state (*AR* 119 [156]) and seems to take it for granted that the "naturalness" of this state implies that it is a good thing.

Usually Gregory's *On the Creation of the Human* is taken to confirm that, as Macrina might here be taken to suggest, we will actually lose our gender when we are resurrected. John Behr has argued against this traditional reading, though, making a case that gender was part of the initial creation of humans and will be retained in resurrected bodies.[37] It would exceed our purposes here to embark on an evaluation of this other treatise by Gregory, or Behr's interpretation of it.[38] In fact, we do not even need to make up our minds as to whether resurrected bodies will still have gender, though one may with good reason doubt it given that, as the character Gregory himself observes, sexual organs will no longer be of any use (*AR* 110–111 [144]). From what we have seen in *On Soul and Resurrection*, we can be sure that even if they retain the physical markers of gender, the risen humans will be unaffected by these markers of gender in their souls. For their souls will be godlike, and God has no gender, a point made explicitly by Gregory in a variety of contexts.[39]

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36 The image of "tunics of skin" is taken from Genesis 3:21.

37 Behr (1999, 244).

38 One might however note that the idea of gender disappearing in the risen body is found in Gregory's brother Basil: see Harrison (1992, 451). Furthermore, in a work on the resurrection of Christ, Gregory himself mentions that when women are saved they will be "healed" of their gender. See *The Three Days Between Death and Resurrection of Christ*, at Gebhardt (1967, 285), for a German trans. see Drobner (1982).

39 See Harrison (1994, 441), Harrison (1997, 40 and 66).

This, then, is another way in which the likeness principle may have inspired Gregory's presentation of Macrina in the dialogue, and more fundamentally his choice of a woman as his main speaker. This is a treatise dedicated to the essential rationality of soul and to the resurrection of bodies freed of connection to passions. Both are understood in light of the notion that *all* human souls are like God, and become still more perfect by assimilating themselves to divine nature. So it makes perfect sense for Gregory to show that a woman, just as well as a man, can be perfectly rational. I thus have some sympathy with Hans Boersma, who has criticized some feminist readings of Gregory, like those of Clark and Burrus, for failing to free themselves of a modern-day concern with the dichotomy between male and female.[40] Against them, he argues that Gregory is not seeking to "assert masculine control" over Macrina as a woman or, more attractively, to posit a fluidity between male and female. Rather, humans in their ideal form are characterized by activities that have nothing to do with gender, whether male or female. Verna Harrison makes a similar point when she remarks that Gregory, and for that matter all three Cappadocian Fathers, affirm "the axiomatic absence of gender in God and the identification of authentic and eternal humanity as a likeness to God which thus transcends gender."[41] It goes without saying that this observation fits perfectly with the reading of *On Soul and Intellect* offered above.

On the other hand, there would still seem to be room for a feminist critique of Gregory so understood. If we suppose that a dedication to reason at the cost of emotion, to the mind over the body, is a quintessential feature of "masculine discourse,"[42] then we must admit that Gregory eagerly perpetuates that discourse and uses Macrina to do so. Even if in Gregory's own mind the purely rational soul is neither male nor female, what he is identifying as the truest, most perfect human is in fact relentlessly rational and unemotional, and hence (by the standards of ancient culture and more generally the standards of patriarchal normativity) an implicitly male subject. Such a reading would, I think, be only partially justified. We saw above that Macrina's method has two aspects. On the one hand, she employs a fairly standard, foundationalist epistemology according to which the properties of things can be derived from definitions. This fits into the Aristotelian logical tradition that was taken up by Platonists and Christians in late antiquity (the ultimate example would be the later John of Damascus' *Philosophical Chapters*). To this extent, Gregory does present Macrina as employing traditional masculinist discourse. But there

40 Boersma (2013, 109–111).

41 Harrison (1992, 467).

42 For this idea see Lloyd (1984).

was also the second aspect of her method: the patient but firm way she leads Gregory the character to a deeper understanding of the soul and its relation to God. It is here that she earns her title of "teacher," and here that her portrayal in the dialogue fits with the pastoral and maternal figure we know from the *Life of Macrina*. We might thus see Macrina as a more ambiguous character who combines stereotypically male and female gender markers: she is the nurturing sister who comforts Gregory, but who does so by acting in a way that is typically masculine. This might prompt us to return one last time to the implied comparison between Macrina and Socrates, because Plato famously introduced the female paradigm of the midwife to capture Socrates' own pedagogical practice. Macrina too is a midwife to her brother.

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CHAPTER 13

What Did Michael Psellos Say about Women in the 11th Century AD?

Denis Walter

Introduction

> O, for one who knew nothing feminine, except what was decreed by nature, but was in all other respects strong and manly in soul and even showed herself to be more resilient than the other portion of our species, prevailing over all men and women, over the latter by her incomparability, and over the former by her superiority!
>
> *Encomium* 7b, tr. A. KALDELLIS

While different attempts have been made to understand Michael Psellos' (1018–1078 AD) notion of gender and the 'female', an investigation that relates these findings to his general theory of virtue is lacking. In this article I will thus try to expound how his statements about women and the 'female' relate to his general conception of the virtues, understood as perfect practical and theoretical activities, while I will not consider any problem related to a mystical approach to god.

Taking account of Psellos within an investigation of "women and the female" is a worthwhile undertaking, because he often describes women, pointing out character traits from different social strata and giving detailed information about the social life of the 10th and 11th centuries. Yet it is unfortunate that Psellos does not formulate a concrete theory either of gender or of 'female' principles in his writings. Even if some of his remarks stand out in their intensity, the descriptions are, taken together, quite ambivalent, so that it seems reasonable to suggest that he uses neither 'female' nor 'woman' as a reflective technical term. A further problem for a clear interpretation of Psellos on this topic is that most passages that are important to this investigation can be found in writings that are not philosophical in a strict sense: for instance, encomia, 'biographies' or letters.

Psellos' way of praising women in positive terms, as we will shortly see, is not extraordinary for the Byzantine tradition. We know of various portraits of, e.g., female saints that express similarly positive valuations portrayed

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simply by painting out their virtues as human beings, regardless of their sex or social status.[1]

Stratis Papaioannou,[2] however, has collected passages from Psellos' works that allow for a deeper investigation of what he said about women and the 'female'. These passages, which come from Psellos' letters,[3] his *Theologica* I[4] and II,[5] as well as selections from the *Philosophica minora* I and II, the *Orations*,[6] and the *Poems*,[7] show how he approached the question of gender. Of the numerous writings that we have from him,[8] the most important work for this investigation is surely the highly allegoric *Encomium for the Mother*,[9] a difficult text in which Psellos sets forth the life of his mother Theodote in a somewhat hagiographic manner.[10] The *Encomium* provides us not only with

1 There is some scholarly debate about which of these writings influenced Psellos. Hatlie (2009, 41–57), as well as Kaldellis (2006, 21), insinuate that Theoktiste, the mother of Theodoros Studites in *Funeral Oration for His Mother*, parallels Psellos' Theodote from the *Encomium* in the fact that she learned by herself; another parallel may be found in Niketas' *Life of St. Philarethos* where there is also a whole family portrayed, cf. Kaldellis (2006, 17 and 48) regarding the intellectual activity presented at the end of the *Encomium* and the *Life of Nikephoros I* by Ignatios the Deacon. Furthermore, Kaldellis (2006, 34) on Gregorios of Nazianzos' *Funeral Oration for His Brother Kaisarios* as an example of a politically prompted writing.

2 Papaioannou (2013, 192–231).

3 A letter (S 157) for the occasion of the birth of a son to Konstantinos, the nephew of Keroularios, edited and translated in Papaioannou (2013, 195–199); Letter (S 180) addressed to an anonymous friend 459, 25–460, 5, in Papaioannou (2013, 207); Letter (S 72) 307, 13–308, 17, in Papaioannou (2013, 207–209).

4 *Theologica* I 103, 96–98 (Christ's "masculine" divinity); *Theologica* I 15, 45–51 = *Philosophica minora* II 18 ('On How Some Become Intelligent and Others Stupid'); *Theologica* I 70, 82–85; *Theologica* I 15, 82–83.

5 *Theologica* I 112, 26–32 = *Theologica* II 37, 74–83 ('On the Gender of Angels and Demons'); *Theologica* II 1, 31–46 ('On the Gender of Musical Instruments'); *Theologica* II 9, 30–35: "The faculty of sense-perception specifically, deemed irrational and therefore most susceptible to affects, is said to be 'feminine/ female [θῆλυς]' as opposed to the 'masculine/male [ἄρρεν]' mind, considered the 'highest rational and cognitive part of the soul.'"

6 *Oratoria minora* I, 1–11.

7 *Philosophica minora* I 55, 82–85; *Poem* 17, 32–36 = Iambic Verses on the Death of [Maria] Skleraina.

8 Moore (2005).

9 Kaldellis (2006, 33) suggests that we should "approach this oration with considerable caution and even scepticism [...]." This approach to Psellos as a philosopher and writer suggests that he disguised his true beliefs and created a socially accepted orthodox identity, being first of all a political mind. But the assumption that his contemporaries were tricked while we nowadays see his true aspirations does not convince me, even if it is an enjoyable interpretive approach. For further arguments, see my dissertation Walter (2017, 12–22).

10 Michele Psello *Autobiographia*, 29: "Al pari delle alter maggiori orazioni pselliane [...]

a detailed description of his mother's life, but also presents intertwined biographies: that of one of his sisters, his own, and elements of his father's.[11] His grandparents are also briefly mentioned. Another work that is central for our investigation is the *Funeral Oration for his daughter Styliane, who died before the age of marriage* which contains information about the education he provided for his beloved daughter, as well as medical details that will help us to evaluate the significance of the body in other writings of his. There is furthermore a revealing passage from the *Discourse on the Miracle that Occurred in the Blachernai Church* as well as several passages of his historical work, the *Chronographia*, where female characters are presented with their virtues and vices. In his *Theologica I* we find exemplary statements of his theory of virtues that provide the theoretical foundation for many other passages and serve as a normative frame for the discussion.

1 Body and Virtue

It has been rightly asked in the scholarly literature whether Psellos assumes only a biological difference between men and women or if he also identifies "socially determined patterns of behavior and character."[12] Stratis Papaioannou concludes:

> Gender categories are thus often used by Psellos as essentialized qualities set in a clearly hierarchical frame: passivity and aesthetic materiality (identified with femininity) is posited as essentially inferior to activity and rational interiority (identified with hegemonic masculinity) [...].[13]

According to Papaiannou, Psellos offers a tripartite differentiation between male and female by first pointing to a distinction between male and female

anche l'Encomio per la madre è un epitafio, genere preferito da Psello rispetto all'encomio vero e proprio forse perché offre maggiore spazio alla narrazione [...]."; cf. 32–33 regarding the vicinity of epitaph and biography in Byzantine literature; Kaldellis (2006, 30).

11 Michele Psello *Autobiographia*, 25: "[...] Psello sembra tendere ad un suo proprio testament spirituale"; with reference to ep. Xiph 6, 189 = p. 55. It is interesting to note that while all family members are presented in one or the other way, his second sister does not play any role in this *Encomium*. The title chosen by the editor of the Greek text and the first translator of the work into Italian, Ugo Criscuolo, was "Autobiographia" because of the many passages where Psellos describes his own life.

12 Papaioannou (2013, 201).

13 Papaioannou (2013, 202).

body, second by speaking about respective differences in their souls (of which the female are said to be imperfect, inclined to "pathos, receptivity, and expression of emotions," while the male are said to be disposed towards "steadfastness and rationality").[14] On the third level of differentiation he sets the male and female "habituation": The male habitus, he says, is paired with ἀνδρεῖα and ἀπάθεια while the female is paired with "the complete submission to emotion".[15]

Although this analysis is correct in its approach and offers a structure for Psellos' diverse statements, I want to take a different stance toward some of his arguments about gender and the 'female' by prosing a different interpretation of the passages. This is because I think that the best answer to Psellos' position is one that relies mainly on the highly controversial second part of the 'Encomium for the Mother' and its setting in his general theory of virtues.

Regarding body, it is true that Psellos starts not only his mother's biography with remarks about her beauty,[16] but also his sister's[17] and his daughter's.[18] Nevertheless, it would be rash to place these statements under a general "aesthetic materiality" for women, since his descriptions of men also start by addressing their beauty.[19] All testimonies are furthermore connected to the inner beauty of a person—that is, their beautiful soul[20]—and they are thus primarily related to excellence, namely the striving towards virtue, rather than erotic impulses. Thus, in a famous passage from the 'Encomium', Psellos can even neglect all bodily differences between men and women by pointing to the virtues that are ontologically prior to any bodily attribute; they frame the discussion for both men and women. Psellos writes:

> She [i.e., Theodote, Psellos' mother, DW] passed judgment from both sides on the feminine and the masculine and did not give one gender the advantage, leaving the other with an inferior lot—that would be a sign of a

14 Papaioannou (2013, 203).

15 Papaioannou (2013, 203).

16 *Encomium* 3a.

17 *Encomium* 4c.

18 *Funeral Oration for his daughter Styliane, who died before the age of marriage*, 129.

19 For the beauty of Psellos' father see *Encomium* 9a–c; further examples in Sideras (1994, 123), cf. Papaioannou (2013, 186).

20 *Encomium* 3a: "And it was not just that her bodily beauty formed an image of the quality of her soul, or that her spirited glance indicated the maturity of her character, or that the whiteness of her color imprinted the purity of her disposition, or that the steadiness of her speech echoed the stability of her reasoning, but the soul itself made its own qualities shine forth in the body […]." (tr. A. Kaldellis)

> thoughtless arbiter and a careless arbitration—but granted an equal measure to both. And if the two genders differ in the tenor of their bodies, nevertheless they possess reason equally and indistinguishably, and reason is not weakened through association with weaker elements, but rather the latter are strengthened by the better element.
>
> *Encomium* 25b, tr. A. KALDELLIS

As Ugo Criscuolo rightly points out, this statement of the equality of sexes is not unusual in Byzantine literature and can already be found in early Christian writings.[21] It is important to note that the married female saint became very popular from the 8th and 9th centuries onwards.[22] Married women and mothers were seen as having equal chances of becoming a saint (i.e., also by leading a life outside coenobitic communities or eremitic solitude). A well-known instance of this view is the life of St Mary the Younger who died ca. 903 AD.[23] I quote the entire passage on account of its paradigmatic character for later discussions—not least among them the *Encomium* Psellos wrote for his mother in the middle Byzantine period. In the life of St Mary the younger, it says:

> The arena of virtue, however, is open to women no less than to men, and God the prize-giver generously grants the rewards and victory crowns to both sexes equally. Neither sex, nor fortune, nor weakness of the body, nor differences in station, nor anything else is an obstacle for entering the contests, to those who desire to do so. Here [i.e., in the arena of virtue] women are not sent away while men are accepted, nor are the slaves and the poor deemed unworthy and rejected while the masters and the wealthy are considered worthy of the contest; those who are young and minors are not disqualified, while the one who is fully of age and already a man is admitted; nor does the master of the games accept those who have chosen celibacy over those who bear the yoke of marriage. On the contrary, all sexes, offices, ages, and walks of life are called to this good fight: *kings of the earth, and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth; young men and virgins, old men with youths*.
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> *Ps.* 148:11–12, tr. A. LAIOU

21 Especially in *On His Sister Gorgonia* by Gregory of Nazianzus, whom Psellos quotes at the beginning of his *Encomium* (1c, 33, 39–40) and whose work is surely an example for his own composition; Michele Psello, *Autobiographia*, 35.

22 A.-M. Talbot (2001).

23 A. Laiou (2006, 239).

It is especially important to note about the first criterion of distinction between men and women that Papaioannou observes, namely the materiality attributed to women, that Psellos—standing in a tradition represented by St Mary the Younger—unequivocally says in all his texts that the difference of body does not play any role regarding virtue. Virtue as an excellence of character is reachable independently of any material conditions. Discussions of gender in Psellos' writings must be understood in the context of his tradition, whose overriding concern was the attainment of virtue.

2 'Philanthropy' as Practical Virtue

Soon after the statement of the equality of sexes attributed to his mother in the *Encomium*, Psellos starts to enumerate Theodote's virtuous activities and names the following explicitly: 1) she hated vices, was full of grace, and corrected the errors of other people gently; 2) she loved her son and was active on behalf of his education.[24] Furthermore, she comforted and took care of her parents[25] by deeds and words while remaining humble and respectful of them.[26] To her husband "[…] she was not only a helpmate and an aide, in accordance with divine decree, but also a prime agent and discoverer of the most noble things" (tr. A. Kaldellis).[27] She was also charitable to strangers:

> For she gave some things and received others: from them came the touch of hands, extended prayers, and hope for the future, while from her came attendance, a sharing of material possessions, service and worship with her own hands. She would wash their feet, have them recline upon the bed and kiss their limbs, as many of them at any rate as were emaciated with disease or ulcerous.
>
> *Encomium* 11d; tr. A. KALDELLIS

She is called by Psellos at the end of the first third of the *Encomium* a living law (νόμον ἔμψυχον, 8d), making her extraordinary perfection explicit. There is no doubt that Psellos portrays his mother in this part[28] of the *Encomium* as an example for a right life and depicts her in a hagiographic manner, describ-

24 *Encomium* 5c, 8b.
25 *Encomium* 8c.
26 *Encomium* 8d.
27 *Encomium* 9a.
28 Kaldellis (2006, 36), notes that Theodote's presentation in the *Encomium* reverses the tra-

ing her outstanding practical virtues that become manifest in her philanthropy towards relatives and strangers alike.

We ought also to examine Psellos' presentation of the first daughter of Theodote, his older sister, who plays an equally important role in the *Encomium*. Interestingly, she is described as looking exactly like her mother[29] and, also like her mother, as being philanthropically active. Psellos depicts at some length her care for a prostitute whose life she wants to redirect towards virtue.[30]

All these aspects of the virtuous activities of Psellos' mother and of his sister in the first part of the *Encomium* belong to the class of philanthropic activities as it was traditionally understood to be practiced by female saints[31] and thus does not surprise us in any way. What, on the other hand, is important to note, is that there is no sign of "passivity". In fact, both female protagonists are characterized as extraordinarily active, carrying out the philanthropic deeds by virtuous actions for the good of other persons.[32] The same is said about Psellos' daughter Styliane who is praised because of the philanthropic activity that she showed already at a young age:

> Who, seeing her compassion for the needy and her generosity with all goods at hand, would not yield to pity, even if he were otherwise harder than iron? Who, knowing her fiery love for her parents, as well as how she depended completely upon their love, and this even while her body was still immature, would not admire this maiden's affectionate nature?
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> *Encomium* 29, tr. A. KALDELLIS

Philanthropy, we can thus clearly see, plays a crucial role for Psellos' ethics and is often presented as an activity carried out by women. Still, it is not limited to women. For as we shall see, Psellos' father is also presented as the example of a caring person. There is furthermore one passage in *Oration* 31 (which seems at first glance to be a simple introduction to the speech), which provides a compact abstract of the content of the same oration. It takes up the notion of λόγος as second person of the trinity, equating it with the true philosopher and pointing out the importance of mutual care for a good and right life.[33] Thus, in the

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dition of female Saints that started in the 8th century, who "had monastic aspirations but largely conformed to social conventions regarding marriage and childbearing."

29 *Encomium* 13c.

30 *Encomium* 14b.

31 Talbot (2001, 109) describes the examples of St Athanasia of Aegina, St Mary the Younger, St Thomais of Lesbos who were all married and philanthropically active.

32 For Psellos' ethics see also Walter (2017, 102–179).

33 Cf. regarding friendship also "De omnifaria doctrina" § 9, 3–4. Philanthropy and Christ: *Theologica* I 45, 104–105.

light of the philanthropic activity Psellos describes, it is difficult to maintain the argument that he holds passivity to be a characteristic of women.

3 The Absence of a Description of Women Being Theoretically Active

While the virtuous practical philanthropic activity of female protagonists is uniformly characterized positively in Psellos' works, the question of how to interpret their theoretical virtues is more complicated to answer; here, what is omitted is more telling than what is said. In his *Theologica* I, 1 Psellos employs an Aristotelian distinction, observing that there are two kinds (γενή) of virtue, the practical and the theoretical. This distinction reappears often in his works, as it does in the *Encomium for the Mother*.[34]

In fact, in the first part of the *Encomium* Theodote is generally described as possessing the perfect unity of theoretical and practical abilities.[35] But it is interesting to note that in later passages her theoretical activity seems always to be aimed directly at God, or—in the case of her fight on behalf of her son's scientific education—she is driven to support his wish for learning out of care for him.[36] About her own desire to learn, Psellos writes at the beginning of the *Encomium* the following:

> The fact that she happened not to be a man by nature and that she was not allowed to study literature freely caused her anguish. Evading the attention of her mother whenever she could, she picked up the basic principles of letters from someone and soon began through her own efforts to join them together and to form syllables and sentences, without having any need for an instructor in the basics.
>
> *Encomium* 3b, tr. A. KALDELLIS

The theoretical activity of her youth, if we can call it that, is not more than learning basic γραμματική by which she can later on also assist her son's educa-

34 *Theologica* I 1, 58–62: "[H]e sends down to her two kinds of virtues, I mean the practical and the theoretical. Peter is symbol for the one [...] and John for the other, hinting at the superiority of the theory;" 69–70: "For each man is practical as well as theoretical."; cf. also *Encomium* 4a: "Also, since lives are divided into action and reason, one of them is eminently practical while another inclines toward the opposite direction. In the case of my mother, however, there was no division between these aspects as everything found expression in her at the same time and this was already the case even in the flower of her youth." (tr. A. Kaldellis)

35 *Encomium* 4a, 5c, 7a–b.

36 J. Walker (2004, 52).

tion.[37] Styliane, Psellos' daughter, will also receive "the rudiments of a literary education."[38] This may only be an indication of the educative customs of 11th century Byzantium. His mother's education nevertheless advances thereafter from the learning of the basics of the 'trivium' to the wish to understand God, with no interest given to the steps in between, namely the scientific investigation of created nature.

It might be argued that Psellos here reproduces the philosophy of the Cappadocians. In Peter Adamson's presentation of Gregory of Nyssa's *On Soul and Resurrection* in this volume we learn that, according to Gregory, God cannot be understood by a direct approach.[39] Psellos follows this line of thought and argues that the route via scientific understanding of creation is the only possible approach there is during earthly life.[40] Thus, in regard to her striving towards God, Theodote is not comparable to the wise Macrina or the Platonic Diotima. She shows no sign of scientific activity related to the understanding of created nature.

Let us compare her behavior with that of Psellos' father, who seems to follow a philosophical ascent different from hers, and let us see if the description of her behavior is a point of criticism. In *Encomium* 18b, he describes his father as philosophizing[41] with him:

> [...] and he added on that topic a number of philosophical reflections, about how it ever acts, how it enters the soul, and other thoughts on the nature of those things and on the careful observation of experience [...][42]

And the culmination of this passage is: "How pleasurable a thing it is for father and son to be together in a philosophical way and to partake of the common victuals."[43] Psellos' mother, on the other hand, is "jumping" from the rudimen-

37 Hatlie (2009, 46) describes her as a teacher of the young Psellos.

38 *Funeral Oration for his daughter Styliane, who died before the age of marriage*, 9–10 (tr. A. Kaldellis).

39 Adamson (in this volume) 260–261.

40 *Theologica* I 30, 84; Walter (2018, 154.) See 'De omnifaria doctrina' 19.

41 Walker, *Encomium*, note 174, takes the statement that Psellos' father brings "forth a proposition and conclusion simultaneously, without the need for an intermediate discursus" as un-Aristotelian. But in fact it echoes a difficult passage of *Analytica posteriora* 1, 22–24.

42 *Encomium* 18b, 1115–1117: [...] καὶ προσέθηκε περὶ τούτου φιλοσοφῶν πλείονα, τί ποτε δρᾷ, πῶς εἴσεισι τὴν ψυχήν, καὶ τἆλλα τῆς τε φύσεως ἐκείνων καὶ τῆς ἀκριβοῦς τῶν πεπειραμένων παρατηρήσεως [...].

43 *Encomium* 18c, 1125–1127 (tr. A. Kaldellis): ὡς ἡδὺ δὲ καὶ τὸ χρῆμα πατὴρ καὶ υἱὸς φιλοσόφως συνδιαιτώμενοι καὶ κοινῶν ἁλῶν συμμετέχοντες.

tal education and practical activity to the attempt of direct interaction with God—as we will shortly see—neglecting the sciences and the contemplation of created nature completely. While his father discusses the theory of created beings with him, his mother tries to interact directly with God. This differentiation between two kinds of theoretical activity becomes even more significant in the second half of the *Encomium*, which starts with the death of Psellos' sister at the center of the entire work, in chapters 15–16 (of 31). Following this tragic event, the mother Theodote strives in an even more extreme manner towards God than before:

> She would often philosophize[44] to me about these matters, telling me that prayer is a meeting with the Almighty and that it is necessary for one who encounters Him not to be changed up to the point when he separates himself from this encounter. She used to call this separation from God the deficiency of the soul. "For one must not say that," she said, "namely that He contracts or expands; rather, the absence of procession or emanation is His unique quality and everywhere He subsists as light, as air, as something else that is common and open, as a sounding trumpet." [...] It is thus incumbent upon us to pray with our bodies unmoved and tranquil.[45] The soul is not entirely submerged within its bodily vessel, but the part of it that has mingled with the flesh is dead with respect to perception, while the rest floats above, buoyant like the top part of a buoy cable or like a light cork that has not been dragged down by nets. It is this part of the soul that a different mind, an angelic one,[46] turns toward itself from the outside and directs up to God. Such was her truly spiritual and divine wisdom, into which she was initiated from on high and into which she initiated us, who dwell down here.
>
> *Encomium* 17d, tr. A. KALDELLIS

Ugo Criscuolo and Anthony Kaldellis have already pointed out the Plotinian sound of this passage.[47] What the mother misses, when compared to the father, is engagement in a scientific search for truth by investigation of creation; rather,

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44 His mother's devotion to god is called 'philosophy' several times, most prominently in *Encomium* 27a, 1688–1689: οὐ πάνυ τὴν σοὶ φίλην 'φιλοσοφίαν φιλοσοφῶ', and should not soften the difference to his father's philosophical activity.

45 Compare this to her posture in *Encomium* 26d as she appears after her death in a dream, praying "without turning about" (tr. A. Kaldellis).

46 Cf. Psellos' critique of the angelic and rational soul that he ascribes to Cerularius: 'Cerularius' 19–24.

47 Michele Psello, *Autobiographia*, 277; Kaldellis (2006, 82).

she advocates prayer and obedience as well as direct contact with God. Psellos' father, on the other hand, is described as having reached intuitive knowledge after searching for truth by syllogisms and induction.[48] The basic difference between the mother's and the father's manner of theorizing is that the father pursues an intellectual ascent while the mother is convinced about the possibility of direct access to God. This distinction between two different kinds of intellectual activity, both wishing to access God, is furthermore presented distinctly in the following passage, where Psellos distinguishes his own preference, namely the scientific knowledge of created nature, from his mother's activity. He says about himself:

> But as for eternity and time, 'nature, contemplation, and the One'; as for 'sense perception and memory' and the mixture and blending of opposites; as for whether the intelligibles exist in the mind or whether they exist outside of it; if, then, I inquire into these matters, I consider it necessary to proceed philosophically. I must, of course, devote myself to God alone, especially now that I have renounced the world;[49] but my way of living, the unquenchable love for every kind of knowledge of the soul and the demands of my students, have induced me to indulge in all those fields.[50]

This preference is further evident in a passage from the *Letter* he wrote to Xiphilinos presented by Charles Barber:

> Do you not see the kind of excess and irrationality and self-ignorance which is the consequence of not returning to first causes and not proceeding by way of rational demonstration, but approaching the heights of issues without rational demonstration and without technical refinement.[51]

In *Theologica* I 56, for instance, Psellos addresses this distinction in an emphatic manner by criticizing someone who has asked what the essence of God is.[52] His answer to the student is that he should first try to understand created beings and even what matter is, before asking such a question. He furthermore uses

48 καί μοι νῦν οὐ συλλελόγισται αὐτῆς τὸ ἀθάνατον, ἀλλὰ τεθεώρηται (*Encomium* 18, 1096–1097).
49 This means the time he spent in a monastery because of political turmoils.
50 *Encomium* 28d–29a (tr. A. Kaldellis).
51 *Letter to Xiphilinos* 51, 52–62, 83, (tr. Ch. Barber).
52 *Theologica* I 56.

the example of Gregory of Nyssa to describe God as not knowable by pointing to the γνόφος that separates him from creation.[53] In the *Encomium*, Psellos tells us in no fewer than five chapters what pursuits of knowledge he prefers—be it from scripture or from secular learning—to the vain effort of trying to understand God directly. So it starts to be quite clear that Psellos senses a tension between these two kinds of theoretical activity. I will present some more evidence of this from his writings further below.

But to return to our subject, it is exactly this omission of naming scientifically active women that makes us doubt if Psellos' statements about the equality of potential between men and women as taken from tradition are to be taken seriously. Of the many examples antique and Byzantine literature gives him, he chooses to quote from the *Vita Macrinae* only once and then only when he speaks about his father.[54] "[T]he verses sung by women, Sibyls and Sappho, the poetess Theano and the wise Egyptian woman"[55] are also named only once, explicitly as poets, while Socrates' Diotima and Aspasia are also mentioned only once in an incidental quotation.[56] Psellos does not portray any of these women as the sort of female wisdom figure we find, e.g., in either the Platonic *Symposium* or Gregory's *Vita Macrinae*, though he had the opportunity to do so.

Now the contrast that is made between what his mother does and what right theoretic activity should look like was taken to place scientific activity in counterpoint to "theology" in the broadest sense. Thus, in the literature, Psellos' emphasis on "wordly" learning has been described as a philosophy of philomathy without any other goal.[57] But this philomathy of Psellos should not be understood as a vain accumulation of knowledge. Learning about created beings has for Psellos the ultimate goal of approaching God, but 'indirectly'. As he says in *De omnifaria doctrina* 19 and in *Theologica* I 30 and 8A,[58] we can extrapolate from the rationality and the order of the world to its creator. Thus,

53 *Theologica* I 93, 43–44.

54 Cf. fn. 42, *Encomium* 18a, 1107–1108. Shortly after we find quotations from Gregory's *Vita Moysis* that emphasize the paradigmatic character of his behaviour in *Encomium* 19b, 1178; 20c, 1228. See. Walter (2017, 162). There could be a parallel between the relation of daughter and mother in the *Encomium* and Psellos' description of *Luc.* 12–52–53. The mother seems to take the role of εὐσεβίᾳ while the daughter seems to take the role of ἀρετή, cf. *Theologica* I 77, 123–124.

55 *Encomium* 30a (tr. A. Kaldellis); J. Walker surmises that Psellos could mean Hypatia and points out that "[i]t is not clear why she would be included here among the poets."

56 *Orationes forensae et acta*, 1, 1114.

57 J. Duffy (2004, 149).

58 *Theologica* I 30, 83–84; 8A 73–80; cf. also *Philosophica minora* 49, 224–226.

intellectual ability for research is ultimately no end in itself but also directed to God.[59] His mother's manner of theorizing, though, does not investigate creation, but leaves this step out.

On the opposite end we find the empress Zoe as she is described by Psellos in his *Chronographia*. Zoe, like Theodote, is in search of a direct connection to God. Unlike Theodote, however, she tries to connect through the senses. This passage, together with another that deals with a miracle that occurred in the Blachernai church, has been widely discussed in literature.[60] Zoe is there described as worshiping an icon of Christ, trying to deduce future events from its changing colors.[61] Nevertheless, the tone of the passage gives us reason to doubt her success. The critique Psellos seems to carefully formulate can be seen in the pitiful state Zoe is in, wrongly considering the icon to be alive and trying to interact with it:

> By changes of colour, it answered questions put to it, and by its various tints foretold coming events. Anyway, Zoe made several prophecies with regard to the future from a study of this image. So, when she had met with some good fortune, or when some trouble had befallen her, she would at once consult her image, in the one case to acknowledge her gratitude, in the other to beg its favour. I myself have often seen her, in moments of great distress, clasp the sacred object in her hands, contemplate it, talk to it as though it were indeed alive, and address it with one sweet term of endearment after another.
>
> tr. SEWTER, *Chronographia* VI 66

Zoe's way of communicating with the icon by confusing it with a living thing cannot only be meant as a mere reproduction of facts but must also be taken to express some doubt regarding the possibility of direct interaction.

Nevertheless, the fact that his mother seems to miss the point with her exigent (and, according to Psellos, impossible) wish to directly access God intellectually, combined with the example of empress Zoe as in some degree idolatrous (and perhaps mad)[62] might indicate a tacit commitment on Psellos' part to a well-known classical critique of women, namely the Aristotelian notion that women lack intellectual ability.

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59 *De omnifaria doctrina* 19; Ch. Barber (2007, 68–69).

60 E.g., Ch. Barber (2007, 83).

61 Cf. Walter (2018).

62 Cf. her description in *Chronographia* VI 157.

4 The Denial of the Body as the End of Philanthropic Activity

In several works, but especially in the *Encomium*, Psellos seems to insinuate that women lack a theoretical ability equal to that of the males, namely the one that pertains to sciences like physics, mathematics, philosophy, etc.[63] In the second part of the *Encomium* (which starts after the death of her daughter), Psellos' mother is described as devoting herself completely to God. The Plotinian-inspired passages where she speaks about a part of the soul that is not descended as well as of the ignoring of all bodily needs, is contrary to what Psellos says elsewhere about the body[64] and makes the reader doubt the correctness of her manner of pursuit. Kaldellis takes these passages as a Psellian attempt to mediate between Christian and Neoplatonic beliefs.[65] I think, however, that the Neoplatonic quotations and allusions that we find in the *Encomium* are ambivalent in character. For instance, Psellos uses them to describe the behavior of his mother (of which he is critical from a certain point on), but later on he uses them to underline his deep interest in all the different topics of knowledge.[66] However, it would be strange if he tried to use Plotinus' *Enneads* or Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* to point out the importance and value of the human body.[67]

It is also true that asceticism is a fundamental aspect of Christian ethics. But if we compare the ascetic practices we can find, for instance, in the two hagiographies of the married St Mary the Younger and St Thomais of Lesbos—accounts we took as viable comparisons for what Psellos says in a hagiographic manner about his mother—, we see that they did not pursue ascetic practice to the point of preventing engagement in philanthropy. Both of them were philanthropically active for the sake of others until the end of their lives. Theodote, on the other hand, renounces step by step all philanthropic activity. Psellos describes her state by noting that she is no longer capable even of standing by herself. She now needs two persons assisting and helping her even in order to

63 Cf. *Theologica* I 15, 82–83: ἀλλὰ τὴν μὲν γνώμην ἡδράσθη ἀβέβαιον οὖσαν, ἔτι δὲ γυνὴ ἦν οὐδὲν ἐννοουμένη θειότερον.

64 See for instance *Theologica* I 76, 129–135: ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ νόμος, 'ἀγαπήσεις' φάσκων 'τὸν κύριον ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου', τὴν τοιαύτην μοι δοκεῖ τριμέρειαν ὑπαινίττεσθαι. διὰ μὲν γὰρ 'τῆς καρδίας' τὸ σῶμα ὑπεμφαίνεται, διὰ δὲ 'τῆς ἰσχύος' ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ διὰ 'τῆς διανοίας' ὁ νοῦς. ὅλοις οὖν τοῖς μέρεσιν ὁ νόμος ἐντέλλεται ἀγαπᾶν τὸν θεόν, ὡς καὶ τῷ Νυσσαεῖ Γρηγορίῳ δοκεῖ.

65 A. Kaldellis (2006, 41).

66 *Encomium* 28d–29a.

67 E.g. *Encomium* 17b, 1036; Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 1.

fulfill the common rituals.[68] She apparently reaches a self-chosen bodily state of decay that can only be compared to that of Psellos' daughter when she is struck by deadly illness. Both protagonists need external help; it is just that one is self-chosen while the other is due to illness.

Here, again, a comparison of Psellos' mother and father is helpful for an assessment of his mother's behavior. Both his parents appear to him in dreams after their death. His father is described as being "absolutely joyful," his soul "elevated into a state of pure dance". Moreover, he approached him "in an entirely human way and did not shun contact but instead allowed me to touch him. He himself also took hold of me in return […]". Most important of all is his Father's final statement: "For at the very moment that I died I saw God,"[69] he says to his son.

The way, however, in which his mother appears in a dream after her death is rather different: underneath the earth in a chapel, she persists unmoving in prayer. "And," Psellos tells us, "without turning about, instead as though you wanted to deprive me of the opportunity to speak,"[70] she denies any conversation or contact comparable to that of his father.

It is quite difficult to interpret these passages in a way favorable to the mother.[71] Returning to the question of how Psellos describes the relation of women to passions, we can see in that prominent example that his mother is not a 'victim' of passion; quite the opposite is true: Since passions are part of our hypostasis as human beings made from body and soul, they cannot be completely subdued. She, however, refuses to pay them the due attention.[72]

5 Ἀπάθεια and the Two Ways of a Right Life

We must now examine the last difference Papaioannou finds between male and female in Psellos, that regarding character—that is, Psellos' relating the male to ἀπάθεια and ἀνδρεῖα.[73] ἀνδρεῖα as a virtue of character can—according to the passages mentioned above—be achieved irrespective of birth, position, or sex. ἀπάθεια, on the other hand, is not a virtue for Psellos. His most emphatic cri-

68 *Encomium* 22c.
69 *Encomium* 20c (tr. A. Kaldellis).
70 *Encomium* 26d (tr. A. Kaldellis).
71 Cf. A. Kaldellis (2006, 36), explains that the *Encomium* shows elements of different genres.
72 *De omnifaria docrtina* 6, 2–8.
73 Papaioannou (2013, 203).

tique of ἀπάθεια can be found in the *Chronographia*, where he describes the behavior of Leo Paraspondylos. The passage is as follows:

> Most people found him intolerable, for he was, as I have said, completely lacking in political temperament. There was nothing very gracious about him: his conversation in society was awkward, and invariably in whatever company he happened to be, he gave the impression of habitual rudeness. He avoided all intercourse with others, and made himself generally unpopular because of his fits of rage and inhumour. He indulged in these displays of temper when someone failed to go straight to the point of his subject and made remarks by way of preface. Nobody was willing to approach him, unless compelled by absolute necessity. I myself admire the inflexibility of such a mind, but its proper place, in my opinion, lies not in time, but in eternity: not in this present life, but in the existence hereafter. The absolutely unemotional and the completely inexorable, I believe, are above all the spheres, outside the circumference of the universe. But human life, just because it is lived in the wider circle of society, is better fitted to encounter the vicissitudes of its present existence—in other words, the emotional element in the soul reacts harmoniously to the physical stimuli in the body.
>
> tr. SEWTER; *Theodora* VII

There are many other instances where Psellos criticizes the Neoplatonic inspired life of ἀπάθεια, each of which seems to include two distinct elements of critique. The first is the lack of philanthropic behavior produced by confusing the requirements of 'political activity'.[74] Thus, according to Psellos the correct metriopathic emotion is always required on the political level, and one ought not to attempt to eliminate it.[75] Secondly, ἀπάθεια is criticized because it seems to go along with a kind of pretention to know something that the apathetic person does not actually know. This is especially apparent in his letter to Cerularius. Psellos there emphasizes that human beings cannot change their nature—the composition of body and soul.[76] Psellos not only ironizes Cerularius' wish of dropping human nature in order to become like an angel or like a purely intellectual being, but also ridicules the knowledge from above that he pretends to have, in a manner reminiscent of his criticisms regarding his mother's devotion to God in the second part of the *Encomium*. In the

74 Cf. D. O'Meara (2012).
75 D. Walter (2017, 150–154).
76 *Cerularius* 19–24.

light of these passages, it is implausible that Psellos thinks of ἀπάθεια as a desirable trait either for men or for women.

Now, one of the problems that arises from this description is the following. Women are never clearly described by Psellos as being scientifically active. If this is the case, what chance do they have of approaching God? Is theoretical activity more valuable than practical activity? If this were the case, the approach to God would be dependent on gender. A well-known passage from Psellos' description of the *Wonder that happened at the church of Blachernai* is relevant here:

> [T]he compassionate nature of the Mother of God, supernatural in her love for mankind, reveals itself to all alike, both to those whose souls shine brightly and to those whose minds are still ⟨dull and⟩ muddy. A person could see her with his own eyes insofar as it would be possible to see—not only ⟨someone⟩ among those greatest and loftiest in merit, but even some simple, insignificant woman who attends upon the Virgin's icon from the back ⟨of the crowd⟩ and mumbles her hymn incorrectly. ⟨The Virgin⟩ welcomes with approval the most excellent form not of words and phrases but of souls; she finds a close relationship ⟨with us⟩ not in the way one arranges words but in the way one harmoniously conducts oneself.[77]
>
> tr. E.A. FISHER

The passage is remarkable because it portrays knowledge as dispensable to an individual's connection to the higher realm. Nevertheless, the last lines of the passage stipulate how the connection can be achieved, namely by "harmonious conduct". I take this passage to point to the value of the practical side of that individual,[78] and it does so with direct application to women. In contrast to the way practical virtues are usually considered in the Neoplatonic tradition, Psellos seems to think they have value in themselves sufficient for a right life—

77 'Blachernai' 79–83: ἡ δὲ συμπαθὴς τῆς θεομήτορος φύσις καὶ τὸ φιλάνθρωπον ὑπερφυὲς ἔχουσα ἅπασιν ὁμοίως ἐμφαίνεται, ὅσοις τε ἡ ψυχὴ διαυγάζει καὶ ὅσοις ὁ νοῦς ἔτι τεθόλωται, καὶ ἴδοι ἄν τις αὐτὴν αὐτοπτήσας ὁπόσον ἰδεῖν δύναιτο, οὐ τῶν ὑψηλῶν μόνον καὶ μετεώρων τὴν ἀρετήν, ἀλλά τι καὶ ἀπερίεργον γύναιον κατόπιν τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτῆς ἐφεπόμενον καὶ οὐδ' ἀκριβῶς τὸν ὕμνον αὐτῇ διαρθροῦν. οὐχὶ γὰρ τὸν ἄριστον χαρακτῆρα τῶν λέξεων, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῶν ψυχῶν ἐπαινεῖ καὶ ἀσπάζεται, οὐδὲ τὴν συνθήκην τῶν ὀνομάτων, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐμμελῆ ἁρμονίαν τῶν τρόπων ἐξοικειοῦται.

78 Cf. Barker (2007, 61–98, esp. 79–80). Cf. also the philanthropic activity of his sister that makes her a "saint": *Encomium* 24d says "O woman [i.e. the mother Theodote, DW], know that you have been the mother of a martyr and a saint [i.e. her daughter and Psellos' sister, DW]". (tr. A. Kaldellis)

whether it be the characteristic of becoming a νόμος ἔμψυχος as said in the *Encomium on the Mother*, or by the role model that his sister is to him, or by the harmonious conduct from the passage just quoted, philanthropic activity is a path of the 'right life'.

6 Conclusion

We have seen that although Psellos does not formulate a clear theory of 'female' or gender, he makes reference to women in many instances throughout his works. The tradition that he stands in gives him the opportunity to reformulate affirmations of the equality of the sexes, particularly regarding the possibility to become virtuous. Nevertheless, a closer look at the relevant passages reveals the fact that he never discusses women that are theoretically active—meaning investigating created nature. Yet one striking similarity among the many presentations of women in his works is that they are philanthropically active. Even though friendship and philanthropy are not described solely as an activity 'appropriate' to women, the frequency of this combination—together with the absence of any comparable combination of women and theoretic activity—points to an underlying concept of intellectual inferiority of women. Psellos would have had enough examples to use (Macrina, Diotima, etc.) had he wanted to underscore the few passages that speak about equality. Nevertheless, aside from a few remarks, he seems to ascribe to women neither passivity (cf. the philanthropic activity), nor aesthetic materiality (cf. the role of a good soul for beauty), nor any imperfection of 'female souls' regarding emotionality (cf. the asceticism of his mother). The only critique he formulates seems to be that of not being theoretically active.

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